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The news of the treaty between Germany and Russia created a panic in the spa on the peaceful Slovakian frontier where the author was holidaying and he returned to Warsaw, reaching it almost at the same time as the German bombers. Within the week orders were received to evacuate the city and the Polonius family retired to their country estate, which lay beside a village on the highroad. Along this road poured a ceaseless stream of refugees and as war came nearer normal life became more and more disorganised. The author took an active part in maintaining essential services till the call for recruits came and he returned to Warsaw, which was then being both bombed and shelled.

He experienced all the horrors of that siege and saw the gallant defence of the city from his home near one of the barricades in the suburbs, and describes it from the civilian point of view. After the nerve-racking bombardment came the shock of surrender.

Alexander Polonius is one of the handful of men who escaped from the ruined town. As his companion he chose one able to speak Russian. Cutting through the German lines surrounding Warsaw they made their way through the German occupied territory into the No Man's Land which the bandits' mistrust of each other had created between German and Bolshevik lines. They fell into the hands of the Russians, but escaped and made their way disguised as railwaymen to Vilna, where the Bolsheviks were already established.

After being arrested and imprisoned in Latvia and Lithuania, he succeeded in reaching Riga, where he had an opportunity of talking with some Baltic Germans, who were being sent to Poland.

His story contains an account of the plight of Polish Jews expelled from Germany whom, by one chance in a million, he saw in a yard behind a small German frontier station; of a city besieged with all the horrors of modern warfare, of the Germans in action and the Russian troops, simple-minded illiterate peasants with whom he talked, their equipment and organisation! It is a wonder that he is alive to tell the tale, an unique tale of graphic personal experiences.





# I SAW THE SIEGE OF WARSAW

BY  
ALEXANDER POLONIUS



GLASGOW                      EDINBURGH                      LONDON  
WILLIAM HODGE AND COMPANY, LIMITED

1941

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TO MY BROTHER  
WHO FOUGHT FOR FREEDOM AND  
HUMAN DIGNITY

*Printed in Great Britain by  
William Hodge and Company, Limited*

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## PREFACE

### SO HELP ME GOD!

"HAVE you anything to declare?" asked H.M. Customs Officer at Newcastle-on-Tyne on the 23rd day of October, 1939, as I landed from the boat which had brought me from Bergen.

He looked with a smile at my tiny suit case, so shabby and nearly empty.

"No notes, photographs, documents?"

"I have my diary of the Polish war."

This diary was the only thing I had brought with me from Warsaw. The officer was lenient and, thanks to him, it remained in my possession, for me a record, for others the means of following my adventures during that eventful month of September and the perilous days of my escape through occupied territory.

However good my memory I could not possibly have remembered all the facts and every name. Things moved with too lightning a speed for that. Having recorded the facts day by day, sometimes even hour by hour, as the perils of the siege allowed, I have been able accurately to reconstruct what went on before my eyes and what my ears heard.

Now, I know that probably some of my notes do not conform to history, but the events are as they appeared at the time I wrote them down. In a beleaguered capital rumours and news count for much and humble mortals like myself have no access to sources and secret information. I have, nevertheless, been most careful to state clearly whenever any entry was based on the experience of others. All the rest I have seen myself, and though later developments have shown that my interpretation of the facts at the time when I recorded them might not always have been correct, the facts themselves are indisputable. These I wish to set before the reader. So help me God!



## CHAPTER I

### A BROKEN HOLIDAY

THE academic session in our University has been less successful than any I remember in the last ten years. Lectures were a week late in beginning owing to the Munich crisis. The whole Michaelmas term was muddled, work went on normally during Lent term, except that we had fewer American students than usual, but from the beginning of the summer term there was among both staff and students that slight atmosphere of excitement which does not favour good work. The students read the papers all day long and so did the staff. Events moved swiftly and there was a general sense of nervousness. *Sub arma non florent Musae*. The research department did not do very well either: it carried on some routine work, but apart from this the results were very poor. The younger students were more interested in the newly introduced conscription and the date of their call-up than in the examinations which, as a whole, showed a poor average. So it was really a relief to all when the session ended.

I was one of those who did not believe that Germany would dare to start the war, nevertheless I always thought that a firm attitude was the only way to stop her. I had confidence in the British Government, believing it to have taken every step to make the country strong and that British armaments were increasing rapidly. In other words I did not think that there would be any war, in spite of the blackening of the European horizon. I thought that the British, French, and Polish Governments were well advanced with their preparations for meeting that contingency. I was an optimist, and hoped that out of the very dark clouds there would come little or no rain. Certain facts did partly undermine my optimism, notably the lukewarm financial support which this country gave to Poland, though it was generally known



how badly she needed additional material equipment, which could not be obtained without strong financial backing.

Still less perhaps was the danger realized in Poland, though the German pressure increased every day and the ten years' non-aggression pact, the sheet anchor of Polish-German relations, had been unilaterally denounced by Hitler. This Polish equanimity was another thing which surprised me very much, but on the other hand it supported my belief that, provided there was a determined will to oppose Hitler's aggression, there would be no war in the near future.

Consequently I planned my holiday quite normally, telling myself that in these perilous days one could not take long views. I had not seen my family for some time and father had already written several letters suggesting that I should come home for a while. My brother Felix had been called up for a month's training in May but was now back in civilian life; and mother needed a good rest in one of our spas after the publication of her book. Everything seemed to indicate that I really ought to go home. Besides, going to Poland, and especially to Warsaw, was always such a pleasure to me. I met my university friends, visited the editors of journals with which I remained in friendly contact and for whom I acted as British correspondent, and above all it was good to see the spirit of hard work with which the Poles set about the construction and development of the country. I always came back from Poland refreshed and full of hope, after finding progress achieved along so many lines of our national life. New roads had been built, new centres opened, fresh communications established, additional university chairs set up, new libraries, exhibitions of painting, schools of art and architecture opened, everything pertaining to culture and development was on the up-grade. The Republic was growing and that growth gave me much pleasure. After all it was my country. As far as I am aware I am the only member of my family who has ever lived abroad. The Polonius family lived in Poland, tilled the Polish soil and occasionally by some freak of nature produced scholars and teachers.

Going to Warsaw was like receiving letters from your wife about the baby's progress. "To-day little Peter weighs seven

pounds." "Peter has gained another pound." "He already weighs a whole stone"—news which means so little to others and so much to the father. I remember the day when I was told: "Our capital has one million inhabitants," and every year when I travelled to Warsaw I heard about the new buildings, districts, squares, gardens, schools being added to embellish and enrich it.

This year I was looking forward to seeing the new boulevards near the Vistula, about which Felix had written to me. He took mother along, as now you can reach Bielany Cloister that way. On the road some handsome restaurants had been started and were all a great success. The people of Warsaw, who had lacked a good summer resort, would now be able to enjoy the fine banks of the river. The Zoo had been rebuilt and new specimens added to it under the able management of Professor Zabinski. My sister Zula had written enthusiastically about the new wing of the National Museum, which had all been transferred to its new quarters. I had not yet seen the collection of paintings by Wyspianski, my favourite painter and poet, whose water colours and pastels displayed a fervent genius intolerant of restriction, and were closely akin to the landscapes of Gauguin. Oh yes! and the latest achievement of Warsaw's energetic mayor, Starzynski, the uncovering, through slum clearance in old Warsaw, of some old city walls. The Russians, during their long occupation, had done everything in their power to prevent progress and to "uglify" the town, or, as when they built the Russian Basilica, to "russify" it. Now the new generation of Poles was working hard to uncover the real Warsaw and to build a new one. There were so many things to see that I was sure I should again leave Warsaw without having seen them all. Then I wanted to go to the new revues and plays and hear the latest of those gay, light and innocently naughty Warsaw jokes which spread like lightning through the fashionable cafés of the capital.

I was glad that Poland had put an abrupt end to her flirtation with Germany and its idols, and that her politicians had returned to their senses. Last year the anti-Liberal wave which had spread through the towns and universities had, to the sorrow of all decent people, reached a high level, but as at the touch of a magic wand,

it ebbed as soon as Hitler declared himself openly hostile to Poland.

The day of my departure was approaching. I wanted to be in Warsaw in the first week of August. The last thing I did in London was to get my passport stamped with the German visa which was now required for all travellers. My visit to the German consulate was short but very interesting. The new office of the passports' section is in the former Austrian Legation in Belgrave Square, hitherto the home of music and learning. In a large room with a soft Turkish carpet, pleasant furniture and an ornamental fireplace, were a number of hideous office tables and chairs. At each sat a young German lady issuing visas which she handed out with a smile strictly apportioned to the kind of customer she was serving. The few people who still wanted to go to Germany as tourists were directed to the most attractive blonde, who issued the visas easily and quickly, adding to each an inviting smile; business people were also treated politely, but with a less charming smile; passengers like myself who merely wanted transit visas and were obviously not intending to stay in the country or spend money there, were just given their visas and no smile; while refugees and the unfortunate citizens of conquered Austria and Czechoslovakia had to go to a different room altogether, and what their treatment was like there only they could say. Everything in Germany is systematic and organized; even smiles and civilities are measured according to how much you have got to spend. All this was watched from the wall by a huge portrait of the Emperor Francis Joseph sombrely smiling from his gilded frame. The great Emperor of Austria, once a ruler of nearly 60 million souls, was now reduced to a vassal of the Third Reich and kindly tolerated on the wall by the German Consul in his own Consulate.

I left London on Bank Holiday, travelling by day to Holland, and arrived about noon on Tuesday at Neu Bentschen on the eastern German frontier. Owing to the strained political situation the train was nearly empty. Here I came up against the foreign exchange control and found that I had to get some additional

certificates to enable me to take my cash out of Germany, and this made me miss the train to Warsaw. It was very annoying, but could not be helped. I had my luggage taken to the cloakroom and found myself alone on the platform of this frontier station.

I felt a little eerie. There was really no reason at all for it; everything was perfectly orderly; the numerous policemen and S.S. men disappeared inside the station; the railwaymen were cleaning up the bits of paper and cigarettes and emptying the wastepaper baskets, while others oiled the shunting points; but still I was uneasy. I had the feeling that I ought not to be too inquisitive, that curiosity might be dangerous. I had heard that the Germans were already becoming extremely impolite to passengers, that you could feel, especially with the Black Guards, that cocksureness which presages some more hostile step. The usual German thoroughness was now no longer disguised with schooled politeness. This was especially noticeable in the eastern provinces of the Reich. Everything in Germany is harder and stiffer, even politeness. While we, for instance, guard ourselves from unwelcome visitors with the word "Private" on our doors, the Germans will put "Strictly Prohibited" or "Prohibited by the Police," and so it is in every walk of life.

There was nothing to indicate that passengers with ordinary transit visas might not enter the station, but as this was a frontier town and the regulations might be stricter, I deemed it wise to ask my porter whether I could go to the buffet. Rather harshly I was told that I could go to the restaurant on the other side of the station. Suddenly he added:

"You had better take a walk in the town, if they allow it. You will not like being in the station."

"Why not?" I asked, giving him a handsome tip which made him a little more communicative.

"They are transporting some Polish Jews who have been forcibly evacuated from the Reich. The station inside is already full of them, but until the international express has passed they are not allowed to show themselves on the platform. The station-master doesn't think it right that foreign passengers should see such sights."

Then suddenly he stopped. Next to us stood a squarely built S.S. man in full uniform with black leggings, a revolver, and the dagger of honour worn by every member of the Black Guard. The porter immediately busied himself with his work, and left me alone with the S.S. man. Not knowing how to start the conversation I asked him :

"I hope you won't mind if I go to the restaurant?"

"I have nothing to do with the restaurant. I suppose you may go if you ask the ticket collector," he said in a most unpleasant manner.

The press has dealt fully with the ruthless behaviour of the Germans in expelling Jews with Polish passports, no matter how many years they had been established in the Reich. They packed them into trains, took them across the frontier and dumped them in the narrow no-man's-land between the two frontier towns. What was happening here was probably part of that brutal expatriation.

I walked through the booking office into the station hall. There I saw a tragic mass of Jewish misery, mostly women and children, and old men sitting near or on their bundles. The S.S. men pushed them back against the walls trying to make a clear passage to the booking office. They were herded about like animals, their faces uncertain, frightened, sullen. Some of the mothers asked whether they could fill their flasks with water.

"Not now," was the answer. "You will fill your flasks when you arrive in Poland."

"But my child must have a drink, you cannot refuse him a drop of water. I will be back in a second," implored one woman.

"Not now I said," snapped a huge man with a swastika.

I sat down on a bench nearby and, pretending to read a book, carefully watched what was going on. The clamour of the women and the occasional cries of the children brought a higher official to the spot. "What is all this row about?" he asked, turning to a young S.S. man with a pompously bored expression. The man told him and he barked at the woman :

"Quiet, this is not a ghetto here! You are not in Poland yet. You have been told to wait. There will be no water now. I will allow you to fill your bottles before the train leaves."

"But we have already been waiting such a long time," clamoured some of the women. "When will this train start?"

"It will start, when it starts. Shut up!" and he turned on his heel and walked away.

To have to witness such a scene was too unpleasant for words. I don't think slaves could be treated worse. After all, I was on holiday and did not want to be a spectator of tragedies which I was powerless to help. I only wished that their misery might be shortened and that their train would soon take them to the relative prosperity awaiting them in their new country.

I went to the restaurant. All the German illustrated papers were to be had there and some of the customs officials and S.S. men were reading them over a large glass of Pilsner. They were all supplied by one agency for distributing propaganda material in the districts adjacent to the eastern frontier and bore a rubber stamp to that effect.

After lunch I got permission to take a little stroll in the village. It was clean and deserted, with not a soldier to be seen anywhere. A few children were buying sweets in a little shop, but otherwise the streets were empty. Beside the church, among its weeping willows, was the village notice board. On it was posted a reproduction of a picture by Doré which depicted the slaughter of Indian women and children by the English and bore underneath a most abusive attack on Commander Stephen King-Hall and his News-Letters, calling upon him to remember the persecutions in India. The whole was supposed to prove that the English persecuted their own subjects, while pretending to be God-fearing and universal benefactors. It was a typical German propaganda poster; crude and yet giving the appearance of impartiality by reproducing a picture by a Frenchman. You see, it is not only the Germans who think that of the English. Look Germans! even a Frenchman, Doré, represents them in that light. A Frenchman could not possibly be accused of bias against the British, and here you are. Look and judge for yourselves the cruelty of the English as represented by their own ally! What business, then, has Commander King-Hall to nose about in German affairs and poison German domestic waters? The only thing which the poster did

not say was that Doré's picture was painted many decades ago and that, whatever one may say about the British rule in India at that time, it was no longer applicable now.

I strolled back towards the station enjoying the warmth of the sun which was slowly sinking behind the church, piercing through the green leaves of the weeping willows and tinging them with gold. There was no wind in the little place. How exaggerated at that moment seemed all the press reports about German military preparations and concentrations of troops on the frontier. Here was I in a border town and could not find a trace of a soldier. True, there had been many in the train on the way to Berlin, but here in Neu Bentschen I could not see one. Yes, I shall be able to tell my friends in Warsaw that I haven't seen anything alarming here. How many people ever stop here? Very few, I suppose; especially now that the traffic between Poland and Germany is so restricted. One had even heard of some arrests.

Thinking about all these things, I returned slowly to the station. What is that strange sort of wailing noise? It seemed to come from a yard close by the station and even at that distance sounded as though somebody were being beaten. I was not wrong. The yard contained a number of Jewish emigrants. They were being pushed and hustled, forced to leave their luggage behind and were all on the verge of panic. Husbands were calling their wives who had got separated from them; mothers desperately yelled at their children; some women implored the S.S. men to let them take their bedding with them, because they would have nowhere to sleep, others begged to be allowed to post a letter to somebody left behind. All these requests were coldly and invariably refused.

"You are not allowed to take the bedding with you; it has not been inspected by the authorities," answered an S.S. man icily, adjusting his gloves.

"But have mercy upon a poor widow; I have three children with me, where will they sleep?" cried a thin poor woman.

"You will have to ask the Jewish Committee in Poland to provide you with what you need; we cannot be bothered with

your stuff. In the meantime it will be kept in our storehouse under your name."

That meant that she would never see it again, owing to the infinite restrictions on removing Jewish property and the S.S. man knew it perfectly well. But everything in the Reich has a veneer of correctness, even when they dispossess people of their last pillows and blankets.

The train, a shabby local train, arrived drawn by a small shunting engine and all that large crowd was given ten minutes to get into it. Naturally pandemonium broke out, for they were not very well disciplined and surged forward, some fighting to get their cases and bundles in with them. They trampled over the children and the frail of the women; and in the excitement one very stout middle-aged lady was seized by a sharp liver attack and collapsed on the platform. Another woman unbuttoned her clothes and rubbed her temples with lavender, but the sight of a woman having convulsions in public on a German platform so disgusted the aesthetic sense of one of the S.S. men that, with his heavy black boot, he rolled her out of the way against the wall, as if she were a block of wood. This was not sadism, it was merely that his sense of order and tidiness was offended. If it had been sadism, from the human point of view, it would have been ever so much better—natural, even though degenerate—but this was something that had deliberately been taught him. Who cared for the suffering of a woman, especially a Jewish woman? But that a German frontier station should be fouled by such a hag lying there in public, that was a disgrace. The station doctor was called to the stout Jewess. He came in an immaculate overall and gave her some drugs, which probably alleviated the pain. With meticulous care the S.S. man opened the woman's bag—she was too weak to speak—and poured all the money it contained on to the bench, counted it, and handed it all to the doctor, saying:

"She has only two marks and seventy-three pfennigs, you will be more than one mark short."

Yes, the station doctor was one mark short. It was all the woman had. I am sure that had a foreign passenger in an express collapsed he would have been attended by the same doctor with



an efficient smile and have been told that the Reich provides such services free as a matter of course. And he would have left Germany reinforced in his admiration for the organization of that wonderful nation.

I met the same poor woman in Zbaszyn, where I gave her a few shillings. She was such a wreck that she did not know what I was doing for her, and another woman had to tell her.

"This gentleman is giving you money, say thank you to him."

She really did not believe that anybody would do anything for her. Others were in a similar state and the stationmaster there told me how pathetic it was to watch the Jews arriving in such a condition day after day.

At Zbaszyn I had to extend my ticket. The clerk in the booking office asked me to pay in small coin as he could not change notes.

"Don't you know that we are short of coin in Poland?"

"I did not know, I come from abroad."

"This is part of the German game to disorganize our economic life, their silver war."

I did not exactly understand what he meant, but could not stop to ask as there were others waiting for tickets. In the train I got into conversation with a merchant from Poznan. He smiled when I admitted ignorance about the shortage of silver and nickel coin.

"There has recently been hoarding of silver and nickel coin on an enormous scale, all encouraged by the Germans and their agents. It is completely disorganizing the economic life of the country and the Government have decided to take strong measures to counteract it. You cannot possibly change a twenty zloty note. Business people have to go without business owing to this artificial shortage. Yesterday the authorities searched the Co-operative German Bank in Torun and discovered that a great part of their cash was held in silver. This in spite of the Government's appeal not to hoard silver."

"Is it really as bad as that?"

"It is worse than you can possibly imagine. I tell you, people

have to refuse customers because they cannot give them change."

"And what is the Government doing about it?"

"They have issued an enormous quantity of new coins, but it is all like filling the pitchers of Danaïdes, without a bottom. The German agents have been busily telling the peasants that the silver coins have a higher value than paper. That is quite silly, because the silver content of the coin is only a fraction of its nominal value."

In the restaurant car I had to pay with a note and the waiter apologized for being unable to give me the right change. He took my name and address and said that the money would be sent to me later. In the circumstances I was glad that Felix, to whom I had wired that I had missed my train, came to the station to fetch me in the car.

At home one of the first questions with which I was met was :

"Can we be quite sure that if any trouble starts with Germany we can count on our Allies?"

I have never seen my folk so confident and so undaunted about the future as at that time.

"Things look pretty black, but I am sure the Germans are bluffing. If our Allies really mean to come to our help, they will never dare to attack us. Moreover we can defend ourselves."

Then the womenfolk turned the conversation to the great problem of holidays.

"We are not going to stay in Warsaw all the summer? It's all right for father to spend his evenings in the garden and imagine that he is in the country, but the suburbs of Warsaw are not the country."

As usual (and I suppose the Polonius family is not peculiar in this respect) everybody wanted to go somewhere different. Finally it was decided that Felix should take the car and go with Zula to the seaside at Gdynia, where there was something new to be seen every year. This year it was especially interesting to go to the Maritime Province and many regarded it as their patriotic duty to spend at least a few days at the sea which was now disputed by Hitler. At the Polish sea! True, there was trouble brewing in

Danzig and some reports said that the Germans were illegally amassing large quantities of arms and munitions, but as long as we held the Island of Westerplatte with its long-range guns everything would be all right. I heard innumerable references to our command of Danzig; it was said that our defences on Westerplatte were really wonderful, and that we had the very best long-range artillery commanding the city.

Many of our Warsaw friends had already left for their holidays. The authorities encouraged people to carry on as normally as possible, because they considered that the Germans might keep on menacing us for years in this way, trying to disorganize our economic and social life. Some said that the Germans were banking on our breaking financially under the heavy cost of partial mobilization and so being forced to come to terms with them over the Corridor. These rumours always prompted the most unpleasant question: Why didn't Great Britain and France give us financial support? A few million pounds would make quite a considerable difference, and what were a few million pounds for an ally with whom one has entered into an agreement to fight for a common cause? But some unexpected hitches occurred in the negotiations and the really substantial loan did not materialize. We all wondered why, but it did not come. In innumerable conversations in various cafés this question arose again and again:

"What are they still waiting for? Do they really mean it?"

Mother and I went to a spa in the south, right on the Slovakian border. The spas there are well known all over Poland and rest was what mother really needed. For me, it was a pleasant break this holiday among the mountains and the exquisite fir and pine forests, the home of the delightful folklore of Krynica. To that add the comfort of newly built hotels and the possibility of having a reliable partner for a game of tennis, and you have the typical happy picture of an ordinary holiday. But it was not really an ordinary holiday.

All the government officials sunbathing there with their wives tried hard not to read the papers, but the newsboys had only to appear on the river beach to sell all their papers at once and people's happy preoccupation with the colour of their skin and

the manufacture of sand pies gave way to more serious thoughts. The German demands were growing more and more insistent, while on the other hand the "No" of France and Britain was not firm enough. There was still too much talk about "reasonable" arrangements and too little straight speaking, and most important of all—we had not yet received the money from Britain. True the Western Powers had accelerated their rearmament and were preparing more vigorously. Here and there in Poland you came across men and women whose brothers, sons or husbands had been called for an indefinite period to the colours, but there was nothing yet even like partial mobilization. The lumbermen coming on their rafts from Slovakia, piloting them along the swift waters of the River Poprad, reported strange activities on the other side of the frontier, and a large concentration of supplies by the Germans. People listened with one ear and tried to forget it in a swim, or a game of tennis or bridge. But, how could you?

*Monday, 21st August, 1939*

Mother and I went to-day on a most exciting excursion to the valley of the River Dunajec, one of the most famous beauty spots in the country. You go part of the way on rafts piloted by mountaineers in local costume. The river cuts through the shoulders of the mountains, forms steep canyons and gullies and opens up exquisite glimpses of mountain scenery. Such a magnificent all-day excursion combined with a dish of the famous river trout almost made one forget the political situation. But we were rudely reminded of it as soon as we returned to our hotel, where we found most people in a state of panic, some already packing their bags and talking of returning home.

"Ribbentrop is flying to Moscow to make a pact with Stalin! Hitler is negotiating with the Bolsheviks. Can you imagine it? There is nothing good to be expected from that combination."

The news that the two arch-enemies were now talking business electrified everybody. It electrified the whole world. What a thieves' kitchen!

*Tuesday, 22nd August*

Many of the people in our hotel received telegrams calling them

instantly back to Warsaw. Nearly all the civil servants were leaving to-day. The page-boys were busy all day bringing down suit cases and all the trains were filled to overflowing. Some people who had booked their return sleepers were ready to part with them for next to nothing and crammed into third class compartments. Everybody wanted to be home.

The German demands do not seem to be confined to the Danzig question; they increase from hour to hour. Hitler insists that the government should immediately send an envoy to Berlin with full powers to cede parts of our territory. Thank Heaven that we have a strong army to look after our frontiers, and allies who have guaranteed them. Our foreign minister made it quite clear in May that he was ready to negotiate with the German Chancellor, but that there are values which are even dearer to us than peace. In saying that he expressed the sentiment of the whole nation.

*Wednesday, 23rd August*

This evening it was definitely confirmed on the wireless that a German-Russian pact had been signed in Moscow, and that the two countries had found a common language. What could that language be, if not the partition of our country? The news was the signal for everybody to cut their holiday short and go. Mother was reading Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, and wants me to read it too. She said that she feels that war cannot be averted and that she had a dream that our family will be scattered. Events have upset her a little, but she keeps very cool and says that she will not leave in a hurry but will wait until the majority have gone. She is afraid that Felix may be called up again, but I tried to convince her that as he has been called up once already this year, it is rather unlikely that he will be again so soon. On the other hand it is known that some reserve officers called up in the summer for six weeks have not been released yet. We got a letter from Felix to-day telling us only that he was enjoying himself and that the bathing was good. Of course that was two days ago. To-day Hitler has appointed his Gauleiter in Danzig, a flagrant violation of the treaties and an open challenge to Poland.

## A BROKEN HOLIDAY

Everybody is wondering how Poland will react to this last insult. It has also been reported in the papers that the number of German agents coming into Danzig from Germany disguised as "tourists" is steadily increasing. This will be a difficult problem to deal with, particularly when they attempt to occupy the key positions in the city. But surely our military authorities must know about it and are keeping an eye on them. Moreover, there is still France and England, and this time it seems that they really mean business.

*Friday, 25th August*

The whole place is gradually being depopulated. Nobody thinks now of tennis or the medicinal baths, but only of how to obtain a ticket to Warsaw, Lwow, Cracow. The railways are maintaining a wonderful service and always coping with the passenger traffic. Luggage has to follow later. This panic seems ridiculous, but the place is within a stone's throw of the border and should the Germans attack from Slovakia they would be here within half-an-hour. But I do not think that it will come to that. Hitler is trying to create great international tension, but when he meets with resolute opposition he will have to come to terms.

Polish soldiers have taken over the bridges, and guards have been placed at various points. They are out of sight, but one can feel the presence of large contingents, and they are ready. There are only a very few people left in the hotel, and they regard themselves as very brave. Among those who do not pay any attention to the news and carry on as usual is a mysterious German doctor from Warsaw. He seems very active, but has no intention of leaving the hotel. However, to-morrow the last of us are leaving, and it is not going to keep open for him alone.

*Saturday, 26th August*

As the trains were so crowded we decided to go to Krynica, the terminus, a little farther down the line. If, as we hoped, we got a seat there, we should be able to travel in relative comfort to Warsaw. In Krynica, too, there were very few people left and they were very nervous and excited, especially the Jews. I met

an old friend of mine who worked in the Ministry of Commerce. He kept very cool.

"How do you think things will develop now?"

"I am very hopeful. I am sure that Stalin will make a fool of Hitler. I am sure that Stalin has a secret understanding with England and that all this is to keep the Japanese in check. If they learn that Germany is supporting Russia they will think twice before antagonizing Great Britain."

He spoke with such conviction that it seemed as if he had some inside knowledge about the pact.

*Sunday, 27th August*

This morning the most alarming reports were circulating. It was said that bridges had been blown up at several points and that the train from Krynica would not leave. Even at the station we were unable to get any definite information, but fortunately the train left in the evening, as it should, and all our fears were allayed. We should be in Warsaw to-morrow morning.

## CHAPTER II

### WE WERE ATTACKED

*Monday, 28th August*

WE arrived too late. Felix had already been called up and had left to join his squadron. Yesterday he had been in Warsaw; to-day we could only write to him "somewhere in Poland," but I had a vague idea that he was near the East Prussian frontier. Father was very indignant that we had stayed away so long and given him so much anxiety.

"I thought you had got yourselves into a fine fix. Everybody else was already back. Why did you stay so long?"

We explained what had happened, and the sight of mother so sun-tanned and fit soon made him forget his anxiety. Zula had also returned from Gdynia where the rush to catch trains for home had been as bad as with us, if not worse. Our car had not been commandeered, as fortunately it was a Morris, of which there were few in Poland. The authorities were taking the more widely used Chevrolets and Fiats first. Even on the way from the station we saw how few cars there were in the streets. Otherwise Warsaw did not look very different and people went to work as usual dressed in their summer clothes, for the weather was gorgeous all the time.

Mother reported soon after her arrival to the local A.R.P. command and resumed her work. She had two streets under her control and had to visit all the houses, because a mock air raid might be ordered at any moment. We were told to listen to our wireless for emergency messages.

Mayor Starzynski has appealed for volunteers to dig trenches, a part of the A.R.P. scheme. People were told to report with spades and picks at various centres in the town whence the parties would be sent out. Zula has already offered her services and been



told to come to-morrow morning. The gardener was very angry because she took his best spade, but she told him that the country came before the garden. The gardener has a blue mobilization card and so is not likely to be called up in the first batch, but our butler, Lukas, who was in the military railway battalion, has gone already. Cook and Bronka will have to share the work between them. The gardener will help to clear the attic of everything inflammable. We have our black-out all ready and have put plenty of sand and barrels of water in the attic.

*Tuesday, 29th August*

Mayor Starzynski's appeal met with a rousing response, and parties of diggers are at work all over the town digging A.R.P. trenches. And what a motley collection! Navvies doing their bit in their spare time, opera singers, clerks, artisans, shopkeepers, some with bare hands, some in gloves, some in overalls, some in bathing suits, young women with hands so soft that after a few spadefuls they have to take a rest or oil their blisters, and sturdy youngsters from school. The sun scorches them in the suburbs and in the squares, but millions of spadefuls of earth and clay are being dug out and trenches are appearing everywhere. The sun and drought have hardened the crust of the soil, and it has to be broken up with mattocks wielded by enthusiastic Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. It is a duty, but a duty combined with pleasure, with a sun-bath, with singing and joking.

"Come along, Adolf, you blighter, we'll teach you a few Polish dances." Others were more indecent in their comments, which the society ladies pretended not to understand, but at which they could not help smiling, for most of them were really witty.

A shopkeeper in patriotic zeal brought a whole iron container of soda water, that champagne of the poor, and a young hoyden distributed it to the diggers. Some young scouts had a supply of hot extract of mint, which they claimed was very refreshing, despite its taste of straw. Every now and then you saw Jews in their long black clothes working to the best of their ability.

"Don't be shy, Mister Jew," said a scout, "have some mint. You work like the others. Have a drink."

The Jew looked suspiciously at the drink and finally he tried it. The spirit of comradeship was complete; all were infected by that confident enthusiasm for a job well done, and Warsaw gradually became covered with a system of trenches voluntarily dug at no cost to the public purse. Mayor Starzynski, indefatigable organizer, set the whole machinery going. Special patriotic certificates were issued on which the person in charge of the group of diggers endorsed the number of hours given by each.

While I attended to our air-raid precautions Zula worked with such a will that at the end of two hours she came back with a slightly strained tendon, but radiant because her trench was one of the first to be finished. Her book was endorsed for two hours of solid work. Father was also busy. He took a whole basket of tomatoes from our garden and distributed them among the weary diggers, and on a hot day like this tomatoes are most refreshing. We naturally listened at all times to the wireless, but it was most difficult to make out exactly what was happening. There was extraordinary diplomatic activity, but would that lead to war? I personally doubted it; some surprise plan would surely result out of this muddle.

In the evening father took us all to dinner at Simon and Stecki's, where he said they have the best food in town. During dinner Mr. Jordan, the manager, told us:

"The mobilization posters were to be placarded all over the country to-night, but this was postponed an hour ago. I have it straight from an officer on the General Staff, an old customer of mine."

"What do you suppose it all means?"

"If they don't think it necessary to announce general mobilization, then obviously some understanding has been reached."

It sounded good, but on our way home we passed the General Staff headquarters. All the windows were blacked out.

*Wednesday, 30th August*

Far from diminishing the tension the Germans are evidently out for adventure. At Danzig they have been constantly interfering with the station, and the railway services, which are

administered by Poles, are disorganized. Now the Nazis have seized the station itself and arrested four Polish customs officials. The cauldron is boiling and people begin to wonder whether it will be possible to prevent it boiling over. War is in the air.

Before going to his office father said to me:

"I cannot understand what we are waiting for. Why don't we mobilize fully? Things look so queer and I am sure if Hitler decides to start war he will not bother about any declaration, but will strike at once."

"The obvious reply to that," I said, "is that we do not want to appear aggressive and that our Allies are exerting enormous pressure on us to wait."

"But will they take the responsibility afterwards? It seems to me that they don't know the Germans. The British will never learn their lesson; they are far too credulous and too decent ever to grasp the German character."

And he went on to comment on the answer which President Moscicki had sent only a few days ago to President Roosevelt's note hinting at arbitration. Our reply was most conciliatory in every way, but the Germans had not even thought it necessary to give any answer beyond a bare acknowledgment.

Soon after lunch Warsaw was startled by the announcement of the mobilization of all men up to 40. The first to bring the news was cook, who had it from a friend, and soon afterwards newspapers brought out extra editions with the full text of the decree. I went out to see how things looked in the street. Large sheets had just been posted up on the walls giving a detailed plan of the classes called up. The date given was to-day's, but underneath a square of thick black you could read that of yesterday. So what we had been told yesterday in the restaurant was true!

Little eddies of men and women formed in front of the posters, scanning them to see which classes had already been mobilized. "They cannot bully a nation of 35 million," said someone; "we also have the right to live." Others repeated the words of Marshal Smigly-Rydz:

"Let them not imagine that their love of their country is greater than our love for our country."

Those men who found their class on the posters walked off at once either to bid farewell to their relatives, or to catch the nearest train to the place indicated on their mobilization cards. You can imagine the congestion at the station! It was then that I had my first shock. That all was not working quite as smoothly as it should was obvious, otherwise there would not have been such an appalling confusion. Hundreds of soldiers were unable to find places in the trains and waited helplessly, not knowing what to do with themselves. The station itself, though only built a short time ago, was ridiculously planned and quite unable to cope with such an emergency.

There was a great rush on the shops selling gas masks; but people who had ordered theirs three months ago were told that the masks had not been delivered yet. Only a small fraction of the people have them. Some shops are selling substitute gas masks of powdered charcoal in linen nose bags, made by some enterprising manufacturer. At home we have only one real gas mask and three charcoal ones—not even enough for the whole household.

In the evening I met my friend, Major Kasniak, in the café, and I asked him to help me to find some job in the army; but he was with his wife and obviously did not want to be bothered with my request. There were so many wanting to join up! He simply told me to wait.

On my way back I met a rather noisy crowd of ruffians. They were very rowdy and using offensive language, and a policeman told them to keep quiet, but apparently it did not have much effect, and he had to take two to the police station.

I heard some women talking together.

"Oh, now that they have released all those jail-birds we shall be plagued with thieves and robbers," said one.

"Yes, my dear, you must look well after your flat."

"I cannot see any point in the Government decreeing an amnesty for so many classes of criminals. On the contrary, I should think that if there was any time when convicts should be kept in prison it was during mobilization," added another.

"Of course there is no point in it. You can see the result already;

they have hardly been released before they qualify for prison again."

As a matter of fact the Government did take measures to facilitate the mobilization and to diminish possible friction. All over the country a strict prohibition was placed on the sale of all alcoholic drinks and you could not buy a drop of vodka or even beer.

"Did Major Kasniak find any job for you in which you could be useful?" asked father when I got back.

I knew how much he wanted this, and was sorry to have to tell him that for the time being there was nothing doing. He was just saying how disorganized business was throughout the country and how difficult it was to make tenants pay their monthly rents when in came mother, very excited, and wearing her field costume and A.R.P. armband. She had just returned from the local headquarters.

"We are going to have a trial black-out all night. Naturally this is only a trial, but one which must be taken really seriously."

*Thursday, 31st August*

From time to time detachments of soldiers passed through the main streets on their way to the stations or lorry depots. Their bearing was excellent, their equipment could not be better. But the streets were quiet and serious. There were no flowers, there was no cheering or singing, none of the usual expressions of jingoism, only a few patriotic posters expressing confidence in the army. The faces of the people were expectant, concentrated, thoughtful. Shops selling black-out appliances were besieged, and so were the provision stores. There was a scramble to buy food, for people had delayed and now everybody was doing it in a hurry. The Government did not emphasize enough the importance of replenishing larders in advance of the emergency and this was the result.

The flickering candle of peace is still alight, and people ask themselves whether Hitler will really attack us or whether he will yield to reason at the last moment. But there are not many encouraging signs. The expected annexation of Danzig, which

we regard as the signal for war, has after all not taken place and France has decided to grant us a loan, but a very small one, more like a token, and so very late.

This afternoon I went for a walk with Zula after digging trenches all the morning. There was still an enormous number of young men in the streets who have not been called up. None of those with blue mobilization cards have yet received their call-up notices nor have I yet been able to fix up anything for myself. They must get the first of the mobilization over before volunteers will be taken.

I am still confident that the gathering storm will pass without war. In the evening we learned of Hitler's announcement that Poland had rejected an ultimatum, but his ultimatum had not yet left Berlin when he declared that it had been refused. This looked as if the Germans wanted to provide an excuse for imminent action. Hitler is like a player who tries to play both for himself and for his opponent. He does not even wait for an answer before he makes his next move. Obviously our answer does not even interest him.

*Friday, 1st September*

"Get up, get up! The air-raid alarm." I woke up to find mother shaking me. On the wireless the Warsaw interval signal (the first bars of the Chopin Polonaise) was being repeated over and over again. Suddenly a voice said: "Attention, attention! It is approaching, approaching . . . Passed F.A. 36." And a minute later the voice came again: "Attention, attention! Passed. C.H. 54."

I knew from my cousin Andrew Kotek that these announcements were part of our A.A. defence signalling system, a code by which they informed the various posts about the country of the situation in the air. So it wasn't the alarm for Warsaw.

"Mother this is not an alarm for Warsaw. They are signalling the position of the enemy to our posts."

"I am sure that this is the code, not an alarm. It may be part of a practice. Please don't worry. Let's go to bed, it is still so early."

Scarcely had I said that when an air-raid alarm was in fact

sounded. All the sirens and hooters started; and on the wireless a strong voice announced the alarm for the town of Warsaw. There was no mistake about it this time. We all jumped to our feet, dressed quickly and ran downstairs to the kitchen. A few minutes later in came little Anthon, mother's A.R.P. messenger, to report for duty, and the two went out to see whether all the wardens were at their posts, and to warn people to stay under cover. Anthon was much amused at the seriousness with which we took the alarm, being quite sure that this was just another practice. So were many people, and they were slow to take cover. The police had to help the wardens in getting them off the streets. A few minutes later we could hear the muffled reports of distant guns.

"Then it has begun."

How comprehensive was this word it, comprising all that we hated and wanted to prevent, but events did not depend on us.

Cook was petrified with fright, but Bronka, the parlour-maid, kept on repeating:

"Don't you be afraid, these are only exercises, nothing to worry about."

And, as if to confirm her words, the wireless announced the end of the alarm and the sirens sounded outside.

We now waited for some news to be given, and in the meantime our barber, Alexander, arrived with the morning papers in a state of great excitement.

"The war has already begun. The Germans crossed the frontier early this morning!"

"They have attacked," said father, and his first thought was: "Let's see whether France and Britain have declared war on Germany."

No, they had not declared war yet; but this was an early edition of the paper, so probably there would be some announcement later. Shaving was done very quickly and we all congregated near the wireless. No, there was no doubt about the situation. We had been attacked this morning at several points; the enemy had crossed the frontier. A proclamation had just been issued to the soldiers by Marshal Smigly-Rydz and was read on the wireless.

"Our age-old enemy has attacked! The final victory will be with us and our Allies."

But why wasn't there any news about the Allies taking military action? Why didn't we hear that France and Britain had declared war? Everybody was bewildered by that. It was extremely discouraging. What were they waiting for? I still believed that if the Allies took an immediate firm stand the Germans would stop. But they must do it in such a way as to convince Hitler that they really meant it.

Zula and cook were very much excited and one would have thought that the air-raid alarm meant that our house was already being bombed. As it was, it was they who had done all the damage. Cook left the tap running in the bathroom while we were all downstairs during the alarm, as she said we must have an adequate water supply, but when the all-clear sounded she forgot to turn it off, with the result that we had a first-class flood on the first floor.

The alarm went twice after breakfast. We were gradually getting used to it. Immediately after the all-clear I went to the A.R.P. command of our district where I joined as mother's deputy and was given a yellow and green armband, which entitled me to be out in the street during the alarms.

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As I walked along I saw a large number of military cars driving up to the Emigration Hotel with generals and officers. It looked as though some important headquarters had been established there. The officers got out of their cars and ran in quickly; some of them stayed a long time; others left again almost immediately. In one open car I noticed General Berbecki, an inspector of the army, said to be responsible for our air defences. Thanks to his ability and that of the other generals in the Air Department we now have a large fleet of modern aeroplanes, estimated by some at 1500 front line machines. That is a striking power with which the Germans will have to reckon, especially if they have to keep some in reserve for use against France and Britain.

On the walls of the houses I saw posters issued by the Government Party Block (the O.Z.N.) representing a Polish soldier



charging with fixed bayonet, and underneath the inscription: "To arms! United we shall win." But there was no need for posters to call the nation to unite. Representatives of all the political parties gave short speeches on the wireless, vigorous, fervent and patriotic, expressing their readiness to forget party differences, and the leaders of the minorities, the Jews, the Ukrainians and others, also expressed their determination to defend Poland. Later came speeches by various notabilities (including, of course, the President) all full of enthusiasm. Everybody felt that we were in the van of the battle of civilization.

Scarcely had the speeches dissolved into the air, when again an alarm was sounded and soon followed by gunfire and explosions coming from the direction of the Okęcie aerodrome. This time the alarm lasted nearly an hour and the firing was very intense; probably the German aeroplanes were trying to bomb the aerodrome and the aircraft factory. So far we had not seen anything of them and I had continually to warn Zula and Bronka not to stand at the windows. The afternoon papers were simply torn out of the newsvendors' hands. They gave us some details about the air raids on Warsaw, and prominently displayed a photograph of the wounded Lieutenant Palusinski in hospital, who had put up a brave fight and brought down the first German plane.

We had invited a friend of ours, from Rembertów, to stay the night and he now rang up to say that they had had a dreadful bombardment and that the bombs had damaged the electric railway. The Germans had scored several direct hits on the overhead electric line, and the few steam trains running were packed to overflowing. Detachments of sappers were already at work repairing the damage, but they could not mend the electric cable in such a short time. I rang up several friends to inquire whether they had been able to join up in the defence anywhere, but the answer invariably was that their offers had been rejected. There was such a frightful congestion with the mobilization that the authorities did not want any more people for the time being. And no wonder! When father came home from the office he said that he had heard that the Germans had dropped a number of bombs on Otwock, causing casualties among the civilian population, and that one had struck

a children's hospital. But I did not think that that could be true. What object could the Germans have in attacking a children's hospital? Not only was it inhuman, but it would provoke retaliation. Our aeroplanes could start bombing Berlin. Moreover our Allies would have an excellent excuse for attacking the towns in Western Germany. But whenever we thought of the Allies we asked ourselves with surprise: "Why isn't there more news of them? Why hasn't it been officially announced that they have already entered the war? What is the meaning of all this diplomatic activity which is still going on? All the ambassadors and neutral observers have seen clearly enough that we have been attacked; the Polish envoys in Paris and London have invoked the treaties of mutual guarantee, then why this tragic delay? I am sure that it must be bewildering for our leaders and the High Command and making things exceptionally difficult for them. It ties their hands. They could go and bomb the German aerodromes, but refrain probably so as not to be accused afterwards of having attacked Germany first. It is calamitous that the world still needs proof that we were attacked; it cripples our movements at a moment when swiftness and determined action are vital.

In the evening we listened to the communiqué of the General Staff, which we knew would give us the truth as Smigly-Rydz had promised. It announced seven German aeroplanes shot down and an armoured train captured. Operations had begun. Enemy planes had bombed a number of towns and caused considerable casualties among the civilian population. And they did bomb the children's hospital. Yes, it has started.

*Saturday, 2nd September*

Mother and I were hard at work all night seeing that the lights were properly concealed in all the houses. So many people do not realize the danger. Moreover, the A.R.P. officials have been instructed to keep an eye open for possible signalling to the enemy. It was the first night of war and no one knew whether there would be any night raids. Fortunately the night passed quietly, and the black-out was fairly well observed except by the motorists, who did not as yet dim their lights properly. There was, of course,

a good deal of recrimination against those who were too lazy to black-out their windows thoroughly, but most were only too ready to do what they could. Naturally many did not yet realize that we were actually at war with a powerful and well-equipped enemy. They still imagined that Hitler was bluffing. But the patriotic spirit is very high. People are utterly exasperated by the German duplicity and threats, and even war is perhaps a relief to nerves strained by the long suspense.

Except for the air raid of yesterday life has been more or less normal; people go to their offices, to the cafés, and do their shopping. Nearly all the government departments and the municipal authorities have paid their employees' wages for three months in advance, with the effect that much purchasing power has been put into the hands of the public. On the other hand business is greatly disorganized, bills are not being paid, and it is still difficult to change money. There are long queues outside the A.R.P. shops for gas masks, but these cannot be obtained. This morning a woman stole a mask belonging to a warden from one of these shops. There was an uproar and when she was caught, she said:

"You have a gas mask, why shouldn't I? I have my daughter to look after."

What could they do with her but allow her to go home? There is also a shortage of medical supplies for the casualty stations. Some stations have cornered large quantities of cotton wool, lint and other things, and we could not obtain the bare minimum for our street. Mother was terribly shocked when one of the ladies at the depot refused to let our station have the medicaments. Yes, that is our Polish trouble; we are very poor. We have the people, the patriotism, the enthusiasm to live and thrive, but we haven't got the resources.

During the long years of industrial depression the chimneys of our factories were not smoking, no new enterprises were started, and those which survived were crippled by red tape and the interference of the Government. The industrialists were regarded as criminals to be watched, instead of assisted by every available means, with the result that we were now embarking on this life

and death struggle poor, and without proper resources. True, the army was finely equipped, but had it enough of the modern weapons, tanks and aeroplanes?

Barber Alexander told father that yesterday splinters from our shells had fallen outside the Hotel Europe and that a porter had saved an American lady journalist, dragging her into the hotel just at the moment when a large splinter fell at her feet. A woman who sold cigarettes in one of the street kiosks was killed when a sliver of iron passed through the top.

"It is really dangerous to be in the street while they are shelling the German planes."

"You see, father, you must take cover," I said, for during one of the raids he had stayed in the garden to watch it.

"We did pretty well yesterday, bringing down seven German planes."

"Yes, that is a good start," said father, "but I cannot understand why the French and the British have not come in yet."

That was a question which our barber, Alexander, could not answer; not even the highest officers who were flocking all the morning to the building of the military command could give the answer everybody in Poland was awaiting with such impatience.

Bronka helped me ransack some of our cases in the basement where I had two steel helmets from the last war, a French one and a German. I did not want mother to go into the street bareheaded after what I had heard about the splinters. Unfortunately they were not to be found, and as the alarm had just been sounded we had to give it up. Enemy aeroplanes sped along high up in the air, followed by our chasers. Then we heard the explosions of the shells. This time everything seemed nearer and more realistic, but all the same I imagine that it must have been some distance away, because the walls of our house shook only very slightly after each detonation, and the windows hardly rattled. But even that little was annoying and Zula and cook kept their gas masks in readiness, expecting a gas attack at any moment.

"What about taking Zula to the manor? She will be safer in

the country and she has nothing special to do here. Why should she stay here and be scared stiff?"

Zula jumped at the idea. She packed her suit case, taking as much as if she were going three times round the world. Cook would gladly have gone to the country too, had she been asked. We decided to go as quickly as possible, deposit Zula at Viasno, where she would join our cousins and their children, and get back to-night. Scarcely had we reached St. Alexander's Square when an alarm was sounded.

"Quick, quick!" We left the car by the pavement and sheltered with some others in the passage of a house.

"Shut the gate," shouted a man.

"Silly goop," remarked a plump flower-seller, trying to push herself in with her basket under her arm. She was as round as a puff-ball and took much room. "What is the idea of shutting the gate on people who only want to shelter like yourself?"

The argument stopped when one of the men announced "They are over the church!"

Some youths dashed to the gate to look, and at the same moment our guns began firing round after round. Little white specks circled in formation over the town at a very great altitude, and from time to time woolly puffs of smoke appeared close beside them. You could follow the course of the tracer shells.

"Oh, how near!" "Now!" "Just missed it!"

How we all wished that they would be hit. But so far none had fallen. The formation was broken. The enemy planes dispersed and began swerving nimbly away from the little white spots of smoke. Then the firing ceased. Why? A moment later some Polish fighters arrived on the spot to drive the Germans away, and a fight developed. The German machines dived and rose again, but the Polish machines dodged. From time to time somebody among us called: "We got him! He's got it!" But it was only a dive and the German machine rose again to the attack. The battle went on for some five to ten minutes. Our aeroplanes barred the way to the bridges where the Germans wanted to drop their bombs, defending them successfully against the first lot of German aeroplanes. But the alarm still lasted; no

"raiders passed" was sounded. Did they forget? Oh, not at all. Scarcely had our fighters disappeared hard on the tail of the faster German machines when another formation of German bombers approached from the east and were greeted by intense gun fire. They came nearer and then we heard the continuous tapping of the machine-guns and the heavy detonations of exploding bombs. Oh, what damage have they done! Have they touched the bridges? Let's hope not! Our gunfire was very intensive and machine guns joined in from various parts of the town. The bridges are heavily guarded; the Germans won't be allowed to do what they like in Warsaw. Each explosion was greeted with a "Good Lord, another bomb! There! There, another! My dear, all these bombs must be doing a lot of damage. All those poor people!"

Near me stood a workman. He was not at all afraid of the bombs, and made remarks all the time: "Those Germans must have no soul at all to send their airmen to drop bombs like that."

Hatred of the Germans had not yet, during those two days of war, developed to any high pitch, and some people still refused to believe that all Germany's powers of destruction could have been released on Poland, but the enemy aeroplanes did their best to kindle that hatred throughout the whole country.

The "all-clear" was sounded and we quickly returned to our car. Owing to the prohibition on the sale of petrol and the commandeering there were fewer civilian cars on the road, and we reached Viasno very quickly, having driven all the way at top speed.

"Hurrah, they have arrived!" shouted Cousin Julia.

"Yes, we are bringing you Zula, will you take care of her?"

"Naturally, but why don't you stop here yourselves? It is so quiet in the country. We didn't see anything of the air raids about which we heard on the wireless. It must have been awful in Warsaw, so many raids."

"We can't stop very long; we have so much to do in Warsaw."

We were just going into the house when a car stopped outside with a loud grinding of brakes. It was Julia's husband, hot with excitement and bursting with news.

"Look at that, just look! I got them at Jozefow!" In one hand he held a large piece of glass, in the other a piece of a metal wheel. "They are German, really from a German aeroplane! It was shot down by our A.A. guns. The boys were mad with joy when they saw the bomber falling in flames. The two Germans were burned alive, the third escaped by parachute, but our men caught him."

We all fingered the piece of cockpit cover. It was made of unbreakable glass, very hard and light.

"We shall see the plane on our way back," said mother.

So we were really bringing down German aeroplanes; there was no doubt about it. The sight of an enemy plane brought down makes you believe in your own success.

We arrived home too late for the news, but father told us that the official communiqué claimed that 37 German planes had been brought down, while we had only lost 11. Near Czestochowa our army was holding up the chief German advance, and the C.-in-C. had sent greetings to the defenders of Westerplatte.

"They also said something," went on father, "about not bombing civilian objectives. Hitler undertakes not to bomb our civilians if our planes will refrain from bombing theirs. I cannot understand that; they have already begun to bomb our towns. German promises are absolutely useless. Hitler will only keep his word if forced to."

When I went out I was unexpectedly stopped by two plain-clothes detectives, who asked me who I was. It was rather unpleasant, but fortunately I had my A.R.P. card with me. They apologized for stopping me, and explained that orders had been issued to keep an eye on everybody because German spies were everywhere and their agents were signalling to the enemy. As there were three balloons, part of our little barrage in the vicinity, I supposed they were afraid to allow anybody to come near.

*Sunday, 3rd September*

"The air is burning! The air is burning!" called the cook, looking out through the criss-cross strips of paper on the window. I rushed to see what she meant. One of the balloons had been

set on fire by tracer bullets and came flaming down sputtering a long trail of smoke. When it reached the ground it was already burned out. The Germans have shot down all the balloons. The whole barrage, consisting of only a few balloons, which were put up at night and kept high, was not, of course, strong enough to stop the Germans. Only hundreds of them, combined with many fighters, could have had an effect. But four! It was as if we wanted to show that we also had a balloon barrage.

The Sunday papers, which were much smaller than usual, brought us news of many cases of German sabotage giving away the position of our troops, cutting communication lines, keeping ready ammunition for the enemy's use in private shops belonging to Germans. In Western Poland this had attained disastrous proportions, and it was extremely difficult to combat. Parachutists have also been dropped in many places.

Mother keeps the wireless on nearly the whole time, even during the night, when it is only turned down a little. She does not get much sleep. We all keep ready for a night alarm. This morning we heard the announcer's voice repeating twice over:

"The Commander-in-Chief greets the brave defenders of Westerplatte and asks them to hold out." I shivered. Those marvellous men were still resisting on that small island at the entrance to Danzig harbour, surrounded by Germans and pounded from the sea, land and air. They hold out, as they have been ordered and as Poland expects. It is a magnificent defence.

I went into the garden. The sun was warm and bright and the flowers looked their best under its caress, their faces tinged with the most gorgeous colours. I was still thinking of the brave men on Westerplatte and planning how to enroll somewhere, when a window opened and I heard the excited, happy voices of mother and her friend:

"Hurry up, hurry up! Don't wait to ask what's the matter, come quickly."

From the garden I could hear the tune of "God Save the King." That could be only one thing, the thing for which we so ardently prayed. Britain had joined the war. She had declared war on Germany.



Everybody was mad with joy.

"Long live Britain! Long live King George!" Their bombers will be here any moment to help us."

And with us the whole street exulted, the whole town, the whole of Poland. France will come in any time now; she is still giving Hitler the chance to stop; a narrow thread is still left uncut; peace can still be restored if the Germans decide to withdraw from our country immediately. Now we cannot possibly lose the war. We can be assured as to our future.

Equally confident were our statesmen. On the wireless the British ambassador broadcast a short message which he ended in Polish: "Long live Poland!" After him spoke Colonel Beck, for whom it was a day of great personal success. Unfortunately this success came after many brave soldiers had already lost their lives and many towns been bombed. But it came, it came. After all, what is the importance of the loss of even many lives compared with the infinite gain if this time the shadow of Prussianism is going to be removed once and for all from our country. Every Pole feels the same; this is the final struggle, but the struggle which will change everything. After this we shall be able to breathe freely and work freely. There have been years enough of armaments and poverty under the constant menace of German invasion. Spontaneously people hung out flags and improvised Union Jacks. The wireless had warned people not to congregate in front of the British Embassy; the British ambassador fully believed that we were most friendly towards him and his country, and there was no need to show it by cheers and mass ovations, which only endangered the lives of so many people. But where the heart tells you to go, will the dictates of reason stop you? I told mother not to go to Nowy Swiat Street near the Embassy and she told me the same, but stealthily I took my hat and went.

On the way I heard a man swearing angrily: "Damn you, stop that wireless from Berlin playing the German anthem. That filth should not be allowed in Poland!" And with his stick he knocked at the window on the ground floor whence the sound came.

"That is the British national anthem, sir," I explained very politely.

"The British? The British? Are you sure?" and I saw his surprised face clear.

"Indeed, I made a mistake," he said sheepishly, and turning to his son who was with him, added: "Learn, my boy, listen, so that you will remember and not make such a foolish mistake as your dad."

Outside the British Embassy an enormous crowd had assembled in spite of all the warnings, and the police had to keep them constantly on the move. There was no end to the cheers of "Long live Britain!" "Long live King George!" and some better informed about British politics cheered the various statesmen. Suddenly in the middle of this enormous moving crowd I heard a voice shouting "Long live . . ." It was mother!

"Darling, you are really awful, I told you that you should not come here!" we said almost together.

While the crowd was cheering, the German bombers were busy bombing various military objectives near Warsaw. Their attack on Okęcie aerodrome was especially violent, the aeroplanes coming in waves and dropping tons of high explosive bombs, a number of which failed to explode. They had also by now bombed the suburbs of Grochów, Siedlce, Pruszków and Radom, as we learned from the official communiqué and the rumours which always travel the quickest.

A few hours later it became known that the French had declared war, and similar scenes were repeated outside the French embassy. Women wanted to dance with the policemen on duty there, and some students, seeing the French military attaché coming out of his car, seized hold of him and chaired him. Warsaw was drunk with joy.

We had tea with the sub-commandant of the Women's Auxiliary Force who, with mother, was planning an organization of women to make clothes for the soldiers. She was to stay the night at our house, but everybody at home was instructed not to mention it and to address her as "Miss," as if she was a member of our family. Her whereabouts had to be kept secret. The ladies had a long and very secret conversation in the drawing room, outside which Bronka was posted to see that they were not interrupted.

Not wanting to be in the way, father and I went to see one of our neighbours, who greeted us radiantly. So many good things had happened to-day. We were expecting him to say something about the declaration of war by France and Britain, but instead he said: "All good things seem to come at once. My daughter has just rung up from Konstancin, and what do you think she told me? The Germans have dropped a bomb in the garden of Mr. Biddle, the U.S.A. ambassador. Really in the ambassador's garden! Fortunately no damage was done and no one was hurt, but just imagine, a bomb in the American ambassador's garden! What propaganda for us!"

"Did they think that his villa was a military objective?" sneered father.

"Can't you imagine to-morrow morning when the whole of America reads that their ambassador's villa has been bombed? Could there be better propaganda for Poland? They must believe that we are not exaggerating when we say that the Germans are violating every paragraph of international law."

"That pilot should be decorated by our Government."

The evening communiqué said that since the beginning of the war 64 German planes had been shot down. Heavy fighting was in progress round Czeszochowa.

*Monday, 4th September*

This morning I rang up my old friend Piotrowski in the Ministry:

"You must help me to get a job. I cannot remain just an onlooker while there is a war going on."

"Come to my office. I suppose you have already heard about the sinking of the *Athenia* by a German submarine? It had 1400 passengers on board, of whom many were American subjects."

Outside the municipal pawn shop stood a long queue of people waiting to redeem their valuables. The banks too were crowded, and only met a proportion of the demands made upon them. Some of the houses were still beflagged from yesterday's jubilation, but events moved so rapidly that people now took the Allies'

entry into the war as a matter of course. We expected to see the British aeroplanes over Poland any time now.

From the front came the news of bitter fighting near Czeszochowa and the first reports of the unbelievable number of aeroplanes the Germans use to initiate an attack. These are followed by endless waves of tanks, while infantry is hardly seen at all. This technique seems at first to have bewildered our officers and soldiers, who expected the good old, respectable trench warfare they knew so well from the Great War. But our defences seem to have been consolidated now that the first surprise is over. The worst thing, however, is our lack of fighter planes. Our men cannot do anything with rifles or even with machine-guns against the planes which come and rake them with bullets from the air and drop large numbers of small bombs.

At the Ministry, Piotrowski's chief received me very politely and promised to remember me as soon as some new service was organized in which my knowledge of English could be useful. He hoped that there would be many new openings, especially now that we should be co-operating closely with the Allies. My visit to the Ministry nearly ended in a minor tragedy. Anyone not on the staff required a special permit to enter. To obtain this you have to hand over your passport and the porter then telephones to the person you wish to see, and after his endorsement you are allowed to go to his room. When you have finished he signs his name and endorses the permit, and you surrender the permit as you go out and get your passport back. Can you imagine the trouble there is when a passport is lost? That is what happened to me. I did not want to be left without it, especially now that everybody was liable to be arrested on suspicion of being a spy, to such proportions had the spy mania grown. Moreover, if someone got hold of my passport he might use it and I should be made responsible. I had to stay there nearly a whole hour waiting for the porter to look through all the passports he had. But in the end, very much to my relief, mine was found.

The day was so warm that I went to have a large ice in one of the many new ice cream shops run by Italians, where you can have any conceivable variety. The place was crowded, for it will

take more than a war to make the people of Warsaw give up their café-going habit, and, of course, I met somebody I knew.

"I hear that a Czech legion is to be formed in Poland."

"A Czech legion?"

"Yes, by the Czech general Prchala, with the full support of our military authorities. There are quite a number of them in Poland and they want to fight with us against Nazism. The former Czech Minister in Poland, M. Slavik, has made a speech calling on all the young Czechs to join."

"It will take them some time to organize, won't it?" I said.

"They did not fight last year when they had their own country to defend, perhaps rightly, who knows? And now they have to fight in legions with other countries against the same enemy. Poles will also be accepted and I am seriously thinking of joining, because we shall have to wait ages before we can volunteer for our own army." So many others were in the same boat as myself.

When he had gone I picked up a newspaper and read that the army was compiling a special list of people with a knowledge of foreign languages. Just the thing for me. But when I applied I was once again told that they did not require any more candidates.

On my way home I passed a newspaper office from which a wave of paper boys was pouring. With their papers under their arms, they scattered in all directions shouting out:

"British aeroplanes over Hamburg and Kiel! The British have bombed Hamburg. Hamburg in ruins!"

Gosh! they are not wasting much time.

I bought a copy, opened it and read it while the receding voices still called out: "Hamburg in ruins, Kiel . . ." There it was in headlines that a very successful air attack had been made on Wilhelmshaven and Hamburg. Tons of high explosive bombs had been accurately placed and much damage done. But did they bomb the towns? The papers said they did, but I had my doubts.

I returned home. Mother was still closeted with a whole committee of ladies, arranging various services for comforts for the soldiers and the garments' factory, so I went to Felix's room and turned on the wireless. I tuned in to London and heard that the Royal Air Force had been over Germany, and that all

the planes had returned safely to their bases. Then one of the ladies of the committee came into the room.

"The Royal Air Force was over Germany last night," I said.

"And, and?"

"And . . . they dropped millions of leaflets; yes, leaflets."

Here the Germans were raining bombs on us, there the Royal Air Force dropped leaflets. That was not a language Hitler was likely to understand.

To-night we shall have an officer staying with us.

*Tuesday, 5th September*

Had I listened to the last wireless bulletin I should have heard that our cavalry had occupied a portion of Eastern Prussia, that a respectable batch of German planes had been brought down, that in the battle for Czeszochowa Polish aeroplanes, in a daring attack, had destroyed two German mechanized columns, and that we had re-captured the towns of Leszno and Rawicz in the west; I preferred being with the officer who was billeted in our house.

He had come home very tired and looked depressed. I remarked that it seemed to me strange that we were receiving such sketchy reports from the various fronts that it was impossible for us civilians to piece the situation together. There was much about some sectors, but very little news of the north and south.

"On the other hand," said I, "can we trust the Germans at all? They boasted to-night that they had captured Czeszochowa and driven deep into the Corridor."

"The curse of our defence," he replied, "is East Prussia, that strategically idiotic creation of Versailles. If the Germans complain that the Versailles treaty was silly, I agree with them in so far that East Prussia should never have been left with Germany, if the intention was to create a strong Poland. We have a dreadful job there. If our army is not able to resist the initial impact of the attack from East Prussia, which we cannot deny is immensely strong, and which is bound to develop in the neighbourhood of Mława, then the position will be clear."

"What will that be?"

"I am afraid not too good. We have no counterpart to their

mechanized divisions and we began to build our fortifications too late. But I'm afraid I am not at liberty to say more. It is now nearly one o'clock and I have an early duty, so you must excuse me."

In the morning it was learned that two important towns in Pomorze, Grudziadz and Bydgoszcz had been abandoned to the enemy. Grudziadz was the home of our famous Cavalry School and I could not help thinking of Felix. He had been a pupil there.

Mother and I went to see Granny. We had just reached her flat when there was an alarm and at least ten Heinkels came over to the accompaniment of furious fire from our anti-aircraft guns. The attack was renewed twice before the "raiders passed" was sounded. They dropped a number of bombs on the suburbs, but none fell in the centre of the town as far as I am aware. Granny did not realize the danger and kept asking what all the fuss was about. She was all right, she said; we had better look after ourselves, she was not in any danger. Her one thought was that she had no lemon to give us with our tea. As though it mattered! But importance is relative, for her this was the chief trouble. Perhaps it was better like that.

"A telephone call for Madam," announced the maid. Mother took the receiver, and her face changed: "You are back in town, Zula? And Julia with her husband? . . . What? . . . The ministries are being evacuated from Warsaw? Are you all right? I think we had better not discuss such things on the telephone. . . . We are coming home at once. Goodbye."

If they were really evacuating the ministries, naturally it was only a precautionary measure, but who would believe that things would move so rapidly? It was only the fifth day of the war. Thank Heaven, we have enough petrol to get about. Others are not so well off. As we walked across Pilsudski Square porters were loading cases from the Foreign Office on to a convoy of lorries. That was sufficient evidence that at least partial evacuation had been ordered, and that the authorities were moving to some more distant parts of the country.

Zula was waiting for us at home. She had arrived with Julia

and her husband who, hearing of the evacuation, had brought the whole family with him. Whether or not it was a stupid thing to have done, it was hard to say. Now there was no one left at Viasno. They had not been bothered much by the German aeroplanes, but one bomber had been brought down yesterday nearby and Zula had brought parts of the engine with her. One wheel bore the number of the engine and the name of the makers in Hamburg.

"Zula, you must hand this over immediately. There was an announcement that all such things may be of utmost importance to the military authorities."

"Oh no, I am not going to part with my trophy. This is mine, I will keep it as a souvenir."

"You silly ass, don't you realize that your souvenirs are important for the army? You cannot possibly keep it," and after a little fight I snatched it from her and took it to the nearest police station. She was sorry, but of course she knew that she could not keep it. "You can have the little piece of metal. That will be enough of a souvenir for you."

Late in the afternoon Warsaw was startled by the official news that thirty bombers had made a raid last night on Berlin and bombed the Friedrichstrasse station. We were retaliating at last. That was the right policy. I bought the last paper, tearing it out of the boy's hand and read it avidly. Yes, we must have done extremely well. Passing by the Air Force barracks I saw one of the ground staff standing by the railing and handed him the paper. He read it and his grey, thoughtful eyes looked far ahead into the distance. He did not say a word.



## CHAPTER III

### EXODUS

*Wednesday, 6th September*

THE early morning found me sleepless. I was lying in my brother's room and as it began to get light the objects in it gradually acquired definite shape. It was quiet outside; so strangely calm. . . . My glance trailed from one object to another, fell on Felix's writing desk, then moved to his large wardrobe where he kept all his ties; shifted to the big calendar one of his girl friends had given him. It still gave yesterday's date—the 5th of September, a Tuesday. All these familiar things made me think continuously of Felix.

Who knew where his squadron was now? Was it already in action? And to think that I did not see him before he left! It was really awful. He went without even seeing mother or myself.

I imagined him coming down to our large white kitchen in his field kit and belt and steel helmet. Bronka, our pretty young parlour-maid, whom he liked very much, was the only person to greet him. She told me all about his departure, rubbing her eyes with the edge of her white apron. Oh, yes, I knew that she was fond of Felix!

She always repeated: "Mr. Felix is so very gay . . ."

The last person to have heard from Felix was our uncle. He had a post card from him stamped mysteriously: "Military Field Post, Nr 73, Group 'Bernard,'" in which he thanked his uncle for the loan of his car and chauffeur when he and his superior officer came to town one afternoon on business. Since then there was no news from him.

Sending post cards to Felix was like posting letters to Santa Claus up the chimney; they set off, but whether they arrived or not was a matter of faith rather than certainty. I sent many,

but did they reach him in the flurry of the fighting? Mother was too upset and too anxious to be able to sit down and write to him, and she begged everybody not to speak of Felix. Perhaps she thought it might cast a bad spell on him. But whenever she saw me writing to him she always asked me to add a postscript, "and love from Mother."

I confided in Bronka that I intended to send Felix two woollen shirts and underwear. While I sat down for a moment to write the events of the day in my diary she jumped to the job, and in no time returned with them nicely pressed and ready, and made a tidy parcel which I took to the nearest post office. The young lady at the counter informed me that letters and post cards sent to soldiers could go without stamps, but for parcels you had to pay the full rate. I was then asked to undo the carefully wrapped parcel for inspection and when she had satisfied her curiosity and seen that there were no bombs inside, she accepted it and gave me a receipt. Please God, he receives it!

Though I had kept on my socks and flannel trousers so as to be ready for any air-raid alarm, I felt the fresh breeze of morning. How much colder must it be in the trenches! The German raids did not allow us here the privilege of a decent sleep. Practically every morning we were startled out of our scanty repose. This was part of the "war of nerves"; the rest was achieved by the flight of our fancy. Often the cook called us from our beds: "Was that the warning?" Yes? No! . . ." and up we would all get and go to our posts, hearing pattering feet everywhere, and people searching for matches. At any rate we are at home and that makes a world of difference.

Our graceful black and white Romeo, my father's favourite, was sound asleep on the armchair snoring. What a queer dog he was. He could always sleep and look contented as long as there was someone to keep him company. Last night he didn't bark at all. There was nothing to annoy him. With the evacuation of the military authorities all the numerous cars which used to wait round the corner near the building housing the Ministry of War had disappeared. Romeo could see no more army Chevrolets, freshly commandeered but still looking like private

cars, queuing as after a performance outside the Opera House in the Theatre Square. There were no more military cars with their camouflage of daintily curved irregular stripes in which olive and sepia prevailed, no more officers rushing in and out, no more drivers with their smart black berets and faces tanned by the sun and wind.

I particularly remembered one who had helped mother with her car. The officer whom he attended must have been some big-wig, because his open Fiat, which was one of those made in Poland under licence, used to wait for hours outside the hotel for emigrants to South America, which had temporarily housed the War Ministry. I liked that soldier very much indeed and often chatted with him. He was tall, very handsome, and had the romantic hero's expressive dreaming eyes, which did not fail to attract the attention of our Bronka. They were blue like the sky. He was born in Pomorze, in the Polish Corridor, and hated the Germans like poison. He was always most obliging whenever anybody developed engine trouble, but the greatest fun was to listen to him passing comments on an air raid. He displayed an unconquerable optimism and always saw things in their brighter colours. He would swear that he saw a German plane crashing in flames on the Mokotow race course or had spotted a badly hurt enemy bomber making for the ground with a shot through its petrol tank, while I couldn't see anything at all. But I trusted that his blue peasant eyes could observe things better than my bespectacled eyes, normally accustomed to books and the lecture room. And anyhow I wanted to believe that he was right. After all, didn't we read in the official communiqués that so many enemy machines had been brought down? They must have fallen somewhere.

In my opinion he was the perfect type of soldier, imaginative and intelligent. I feel sure that even in face of the greatest danger he would be just as easy and serene. Although during the last few days I have had the opportunity of seeing so many different new people, the face of that man has stayed ingrained in my memory. Anyhow he was no longer there; he had left the little

parking place yesterday evening, driving his officer away to some safer spot than Warsaw.

Seeing the evacuation proceeding at such a feverish pace I foresaw that Warsaw might be abandoned without a fight and the defences organized farther inland. Felix had often told me that it would be impossible for the Polish army to hold such a terribly long and sinuous front against the Germans. We had talked about this on one sunny afternoon when he took me for a spin in mother's car to the new race course at Sluzewiec, a part of that new and growing Warsaw.

"How," I asked, "will it be possible for us to withstand the pressure of the greatly superior German mechanization?" This I knew was a sore point. Felix slowed down a little and proceeded to explain. "You see, we shall attempt to make up for it by greater endurance. Our men are mostly of peasant stock and so fitted by nature to stand greater hardship than the western armies, accustomed to comfort and decent transport facilities." Felix spoke like a typical Polish cavalryman, taking pride in his service, but fully conscious of its limitations.

"Our cavalry will have very important duties to perform while we retreat to the more convenient lines of defence. How on earth could we hope to defend our long frontiers?" And he added: "One must not make it widely known to the public, as it may have a defeatist influence, especially after the announcement by Marshal Smigly-Rydz that 'we will not yield to the enemy even one button from our coat!' The public would have difficulty in reconciling that statement with the advisability of letting the enemy deep into our territory."

And then in his reasoned, convincing way he drew my attention to the possibility of having to yield temporarily even Warsaw and of concentrating on the positions along the river Bug, that is to say, along the same line which the Russians were fortifying in the days of the Tsarist occupation of Poland. The old Russian strategical fortress of Modlin would thus again become the spear-head of the Polish defence.

"And there," he said, "we have been building strong entrenchments and reinforcing the defences. My old school fellow, Bolek

Makoski, has been busy on that with thousands of others. Hundreds of wagons of cement and steel have been sent up there for the fortifications. We know that the first German onslaught will be very hard to stop, but if only we can resist along that inside line we shall give the enemy a great deal to think about. And you see, it is here that the rôle of the cavalry begins. We are trained to groove deep behind the enemy lines; we have to be mobile, independent and cut his communications. So there would be no cause to despair even were Warsaw to fall. Besides, didn't the Bolshevik army under Tukhachevsky approach Warsaw and have to retreat hastily with their mouths watering at the foretaste of our capital?"

As I thought over all that he had said it suddenly occurred to me that perhaps it would be wiser to leave Warsaw and take my people to our Viasno manor, where they would certainly be safer from bombardment and where we should not fall into the hands of the Germans should Warsaw have to surrender. I did not for a moment conceive the possibility of final defeat, but I frankly admitted that the Germans might take Warsaw. I was taken, however, completely by surprise by the rapid progress of the German army. I purposely did not listen to the German broadcasts which were intensely annoying, and I was sure were intended to mislead the public.

It was now seven o'clock and there was no time for further meditation, anyway my chain of thought was rudely broken by the arrival of little Anthon, mother's A.R.P. messenger. Anthon was the son of the concierge in a house next to ours. He looked smart and efficient in his scout shirt and shorts, like most boys of twelve who feel that they are performing an important function. He reported on duty and asked whether I had any fresh orders for him. He was clearly pleased to be working now under a man. This satisfied his sense of importance much better than being commanded by a woman.

"Well, Anthon, how are things to-day? Any news?" His eyes glittered and he reported in his best military manner on the fresh wave of refugees pouring into Warsaw from Kutno and other towns in the west.

"Some of them were again attacked by the Jerry planes and machine-gunned as they moved along the roads, and I heard that they bombed an evacuation train. They even attack shepherds and men ploughing in the fields."

"Yes, but you didn't see it, Anthon, so please don't worry too much about it; and do not come through the front door any more because your shoes are dirty and cook is very much annoyed with you. Always use the kitchen door, and if you come by night go to my window and blow the whistle and I will come down and open the gate and the door."

I had completely forgotten that Anthon, to the great indignation of our cook, had demonstrated to me the day before how he could squeeze through the iron railings of the gate so that there was no need to open anything for him but the front door.

The presence of Anthon in his khaki shorts with his scout knife hanging from his belt, cheered me up. It is probably part of human nature to forget one's own troubles and sad thoughts when one has a responsible job, or if one is answerable for other people. I by no means regarded my job as very important, but after all I had Anthon and all the A.R.P. work which mother had now deputed to me.

I sent Anthon to the dining room to have a large piece of bread and honey, while I had a quick shave. There were various jobs to be attended to. First of all we had to send off the corrected lists of all those living in the houses in our section. Such lists had already been prepared once, but were out of date now. In many houses even some of the wardens were away, either because they had been mobilized or because they had moved. The thing to do was to call our street sub-warden who, as mother always said, "had a book-keeper's mind and patience," and get him to make an exact register of all posts which had to be refilled. Anthon was quick, so in half-an-hour he came back breathless, but pleased, and announced that he had already handed all the lists to the people responsible for A.R.P. and requested them to return them properly filled in as quickly as possible.

While I was having my breakfast in came Mr. Kramer, a tailor from our street, his large, bald forehead shining like a pumpkin.

He was the sub-warden. Mother was not wrong. With the greatest of patience he settled down to work on the old lists of inhabitants of our street, all of whom he knew. I was perfectly sure that the quickest way was to let Mr. Kramer do all the listing and then see what he had done. He would do it meticulously, but any assistance would only slow down the work.

Mother and Countess P. had sent out letters on behalf of the Warsaw Circle asking the recipients to organize collections to start a voluntary shirt factory for the soldiers, similar to that which Warsaw women organized during the war with the Bolsheviks in 1920. Mother took a great interest in the plans for this factory and devoted all her energy to it. As a result our house became the centre of a domestic typhoon; carpets were torn from the floors and furniture moved out of doors, or arranged along the wall under the staircase so as to free the necessary floor space. Mother's initiative met with general approval and response, and throughout the afternoon various ladies kept telephoning to declare their readiness to help. One even rang up during the air-raid alarm, greatly annoying my father, as it was contrary to instructions. Telephones were not to be used during the raids, when all lines were to be kept clear for emergency calls. Before starting this venture mother and the whole committee wanted to consult somebody in the Supply Department of the War Ministry to get the exact sizes and models and the necessary yardage of shirting. But now that the offices and the ministries were evacuated would she find it possible to see anybody at all? Would it even be feasible to maintain contact with the military authorities? We rang up the Ministry of War, but were invariably told that there was not the faintest chance of seeing anybody of importance and that nearly the whole staff had left Warsaw. That was far from encouraging. It looked as if the plan would never materialize, and in fact it became another of those spontaneous undertakings, never carried out, so numerous in the quick first days of the Polish war.

What our friends had to tell us on the telephone this morning was far from encouraging. Somebody said that Madame Pilsudski, the Dowager of the Great Marshal, had decided to leave Warsaw with her two daughters for the east of Poland. Colonel Strzelecki's

elegant wife had already left by car. Most of the military authorities, it was rumoured, were now in the town of Lublin, and the departments which had not yet managed to leave were very busy clearing up in readiness. When I left the house to inspect a trench which our neighbours were constructing in their garden and at which they had been digging nervously even during the air raid yesterday afternoon, I was told that all men liable to be called to military duties were advised to leave Warsaw. Returning home with this news I found Zula excited and disturbed. She was nervously packing her large suit case, the same one which she had brought back yesterday from Viasno. I asked her what was the matter.

"What a daft question," exclaimed Zula. "He is still asking what's the matter! We must go back to the country. Mother had a telephone call from her friend, Mrs. Rikel, you know, the wife of Major Rikel of the General Staff, asking whether we were going to Viasno and whether she could come with us."

Zula was now spitting out her words like a machine-gun: "Mrs. Rikel told mother that the news was not very gay. It was rumoured in town that the Germans were pressing hard from the north. They are already fighting near Plonsk and Ciechanow, only sixty miles from Warsaw. It is awful! How long do you think it will be before we hear the guns?"

I knew that the Germans had launched a fierce attack on the river Narew, near Rozana, and it seemed impossible that the gallant 33rd Regiment of Infantry would be able to hold the river. The German battering-ram was too powerful here and they did not mind how many men they lost. They left mountains of corpses on the battlefields, but returned again and again with fresh troops and tanks. It was the repetition of the Greek phalanx. As they were also pressing in the district round Lodz, that indicated that they were developing a powerful pincer drive which, terrible to say, might endanger Warsaw. "Are we going to fall into the hands of the Germans?" Mother and I both thought the same thing, and one of those lightning decisions had to be taken.

"We must leave for Viasno; it is north-east of Warsaw, farther



from the Germans. After all everybody is going in that direction in search of safety."

"Shall we all go?" interrupted Zula.

"Father is old, and perhaps it would be safer for him to stay at home. If anything went wrong with the car he couldn't walk with us and we couldn't leave him in the middle of the road."

"But we must squeeze in my Lala somehow, she doesn't take much room, this cross between a black-pudding and a towel," said mother, laughing affectionately. Lala, the dachshund, was her favourite.

At this moment the mid-day concert on the wireless was interrupted by a voice announcing the approach of enemy machines, and a minute or two later long blasts from sirens and hooters all over Warsaw sounded the alarm. At the same time the familiar stern voice of the announcer was heard: "Air-raid alarm for the town of Warsaw, for the town of Warsaw . . ." followed again by the continuous warbling of the sirens. Didn't we know that sound! It was the music which accompanied the destruction of so many lives. But it was the music which indicated that the capital was fighting and independent.

"They are starting late to-day, the swine," said my sister. "Probably they want good visibility and are going to drop big bombs on the bridges again. Let us go downstairs quickly! But why is father always late? Oh, what a nuisance, he is still in his room; doesn't he realize the danger? I told him so many times to be in the kitchen. It is the safest place in the house. Cook always stays there; she is such a coward, she must know. Last night she didn't even sleep at home; she says she has found a safer place. They allowed her to sleep at the house evacuated by the War Ministry where they have such an excellent shelter, it is air-conditioned. Anyhow one of the sergeants said so. But think of the big crowd of cowards like her in the shelter, and besides there is a terrific crush there. It is so stuffed with people that one woman fainted twice. The smell in the room is really dreadful. I'd rather be blown to pieces than sleep in such conditions."

A minute later we could hear the bombs bursting somewhere

near Solec. One after another came the reverberations of heavy muffled explosions from distant parts of the town. These were answered by the much higher, drier and more vibrating sound of our artillery. It was as though the two were conversing, a conversation which meant Death! Destruction!

When she heard the bombs Zula stopped boasting. At the bottom of her heart she was very much afraid of the Germans and their bombs, but, of course, she would never admit that in the presence of the cook. She was so delighted to see father coming pompously and slowly into the large white kitchen.

"Quite a small family assembly," said father. "Well, Zula, do you think that they will take Warsaw?"

But instead of answering his question Zula scowled and scolded him. "You must hurry, father, when you hear the alarm, really you must. What are you waiting for? You mustn't say that it all depends on Providence. Haven't we been clearly told so many times that we are to take shelter as soon as possible?"

"Yes," retorted father, "but these alarms are now getting so frequent that you hardly get upstairs before you have to come back to the kitchen again. This war of nerves against our sleep and quiet is simply intolerable."

While they were arguing, mother and I went outside to see whether all our street wardens were at their posts. Anthon was there, of course, but we had to see that he did not do anything foolish, especially if the guns near us opened fire. He must not stand in the middle of the street exposing himself to splinters. There was no one in the street except a soldier, but we had no control over soldiers as they could always refuse to take shelter simply by saying that they were on duty. And how could we possibly check it up? The A.R.P. people had no right to give orders to members of the forces and we complained that we hadn't enough authority.

These deserted streets looked a little funny, especially the unharnessed horses and the numbers of cabs planted by the pavement. To-day it all seemed a trifle overdone, and I still imagined that bombardment was a grossly exaggerated affair. We were, after all, in the sixth day of the war and so far our district had

not been touched. The sun was shining so brightly, the garden flowers were in their best September garments, and specially the roses looked richly dressed in all their soft, warm colours, and my favourite salvias were so gloriously red. Who could think of danger?

But that was not the way to think. I began to scold myself for not taking the danger more seriously. Was I going to acknowledge it only when a bomb hit my own house and blew up my whole family? The fact that it was the bridges or possibly the warehouses in the distant suburb of Praga they were now bombing should not blind me to the real danger. Hadn't I myself brought, as one of my first war trophies, the forage cap of the German pilot Preiss, who came down shortly after he had bombed a children's hospital in Otwock? And I had actually come to feel ashamed of myself when the intermittent blast of the sirens was to be heard announcing: "Raiders passed." . . .

What a relief for everybody! Life could start anew and people attend to their business. The first were the cabmen who rushed to put the harness on their proverbially lean horses. For them a short-lived boom had just started. Ousted by the merciless competition of the oncoming taxi they were gradually disappearing, but now the shortage of petrol had returned their old kingdom to them.

There was no time to waste, now that we had decided to leave for Viasno. Our suit cases and my rucksack were already packed. But what about petrol? All supplies had been stopped except for strictly military purposes. We had enough in the tank to take us to Viasno, but mother would not move unless she had sufficient to bring her back to town, if need be. Fortunately the situation was saved by Mrs. Rikel, who had arranged to come with her daughter to Viasno. Her husband was a major on the General Staff. That made everything much easier.

When we arrived to fetch Mrs. Rikel she was already waiting for us with her daughter Marila, a charming schoolgirl with black vivid eyes and a persuasive little voice, who tried to cheer her mother up a little, as she was very upset by the recent bombing and the sudden departure of her husband. When we finally set

off we were packed like sardines and had the luggage in the back of our Morris. Mother and I had on the yellow and green arm bands of the A.R.P., but I felt a little guilty that we had left our district to the street sub-warden. Was it shabby? But on the other hand we were fulfilling the order of the authorities to leave the town. I thought at that moment of our little Anthon and of the other A.R.P. wardens in our street who so loyally co-operated with us. Was it fair to have allowed father to stay in town? Shouldn't we have taken him with us? Of course that was physically impossible, and we couldn't have left the whole house without supervision. The order to leave had been clearly repeated on the wireless in the evening. It was given by Colonel Umiastowski, the same one who gave those daily encouraging talks to the soldiers with such fire.

We knew the way to Viasno by heart. I could go there blind-fold, but to-day it seemed different. Perhaps it was the excitement or the enormous number of people and vehicles, but it did look entirely strange. It was not like the old road to Viasno along which I had gone so many many times in my life, and which was like part of my own history. I associated it with the holidays, with the days before my finals, when a friend and I locked ourselves, for cramming purposes, under the black roof of the old white house. In the autumn it was all covered on one side with red creeper embracing the windows. On the opposite side were four large peach trees. Those peaches were condemned for some unknown sins never to be allowed to mature. When we were children we always gathered them before they were ripe. Although we knew that we should be severely reprimanded for picking the forbidden fruit, the temptation was stronger than the words of our grandfather. It is the sad lot of peach trees in Viasno that there are always plenty of children there. Viasno, in other words, was the place which I associated with a host of good and pleasant things. It was like Alice in Wonderland's little bottle which contained all the nice flavours at the same time. To-day we were again going there to find relative safety and freedom.

Mother was at the wheel; she wouldn't allow anybody to touch her Pegasus, which she claimed had already acquired the bad habit

of pinking since Felix took it out for his long drive. Quickly we passed the tall houses in the centre of the city and approached the wide stone bridge of Prince Poniatowski, one of the most beautiful architectural landmarks of the city. Here, on the wide viaduct which was over a mile long and decorated on either side with rectangular towers, we joined a stream of traffic moving in several rows across the Vistula. This was a real Exodus! The trams were plastered with people and soldiers like fly papers; the big horse wagons were packed; there were large lorries, small delivery vans, military convoys, and masses and masses of pedestrians all moving out towards the suburbs of Praga on the right bank of the river. They thronged every road leading away from Warsaw.

We were now in the middle of the bridge and in the midst of a human stream too. Below was our broad, grey Vistula which flows through the heart of Poland. On the right-hand side were numerous sporting and yachting clubs, now completely deserted. On the left was Warsaw! To-day it looked prettier than ever, spread comfortably along the bank of the river. It was the last picture I have of her before her mutilation. . . . The sun was slowly leaning towards the horizon. It was of deep scarlet colour and laid a cloak adorned with flowers of amaranth over the whole western sky, its last warm rays finding their reflection in the Vistula. The steel grey shade of the water and the dramatic redness of the light formed an unforgettable background for the steeples of the churches and the buildings on the higher bank. The charming old town of the days of the princes of Mazovia, which later kings had embellished, lay in the distance and the solid walls of the castle, built under the influence of Swedish architects, with its square towers, domes and curving roofs, were to be seen through a thin rosy mist. Near us was the railway bridge; a train was just passing under the lace of its iron girders; red beams of sunlight glittered through the windows as from twinkling eyeholes in a row of dancing skulls.

Mother was driving nervously. So were others. No one wanted to be on the bridge. We knew that it was the favourite target of the German pilots. Morning after morning, evening

after evening, they paid us their uncalled-for visits in an attempt to cut the communication between the two banks of the river. The bridges were heavily guarded. Machine guns and numerous anti-aircraft guns were hidden on both sides to greet the raiders with a salvo of fire.

"Well, we have crossed the bridge, thank goodness," said mother, who had kept silent all the time. "I didn't like being on it." "But the viaduct is not much safer," retorted Mrs. Rikel. She was really an unrepenting pessimist and invariably met trouble more than half way. "Mum," interposed the chattering Marila, "you must not worry about things so much. Every cloud has a silver lining. Think how nice it will be for us to stay for some time at Viasno with Mrs. Polonius. You must not be so sad, Mum." Indeed the pretty hazel eyes and slightly rouged face of Mrs. Rikel looked extremely sorrowful.

"Oh! a dead horse! On the pavement, too! . . . How horrible!" cried Zula. "It must have been killed by a bomb, because the Germans do not fly low enough to use their machine-guns when they are near the bridges. Our guns and machine-guns force them to keep up."

Mother accelerated, but it was impossible to move along very quickly owing to the enormous traffic, which was getting denser and denser as we approached one of the main roads leading away from the town. We took the turning for Grochow and mingled with a huge crowd of vehicles, lorries, carts, cycles and people. It was like a torrent. Civilians were mixed up with soldiers, but all were alike in taking the road east.

We were playing Zula's favourite game of trying to guess who the various persons were who filled the cars, crammed the carriages and carts, or rode the bicycles—all rushing along as quickly as possible in a screen of road dust. We had just passed a terribly old-fashioned car. There were only two ladies sitting in it and they looked as antique as their large-brimmed hats, goggles, coloured veils and puffed sleeves. They seemed to have stepped out of one of the old photographs of the first motoring era.

"Doesn't she look like one of Charlie Chaplin's ladies from the early days of his career?" said my sister. "Who would you

say they are? To me they look like members of the staff of the French Embassy. . . . Look they have plenty of room in their car. I am sure that if you smiled nicely to them they would take you in. You know, you take up so much space here . . . we really shall feel every bone before we reach Viasno. And at this rate it will take us ages to get there."

"All the time we have to make room for the army. They must come before the civilians."

"Now you see why we had to construct such wide roads; in peace it seemed ridiculous, but now they are not wide enough."

We were just passing near the large ordnance factory which manufactured field telephones and wireless.

"Was there a fire here? Perhaps the factory was hit inside by a bomb," said Marila.

Indeed the whole road was strewn with glass and bits of brick and there was not one window pane to be seen in the whole works. We were now entering the zone where the Germans had already done much damage with their bombs.

"Look," said mother, "knowing the systematic German nature I should say they are going to proceed with their destruction by stages. Now they are bombing the suburbs, but before long the whole of Warsaw will lie in ruins."

We came to a most congested part of the road where the traffic had to move in single file. This was the beginning of the city's first line of defence and we could see a wide trench across the road. Only by skilful zig-zagging was it possible to pass and continue farther. This was one of the tank traps they were already preparing and there were gangs of enthusiastic workers hastily constructing others. Two soldiers with yellow banners were clumsily regulating the traffic.

"Those fellows obviously would not make good coppers. Look at this frightful jam! We shall be stuck here for hours."

Fortunately an officer appeared on the scene and things started moving more quickly. By an adroit manoeuvre we passed the obstacle, but soon arrived before an even larger trench cutting through the middle of the road. A detachment of infantry was just moving along and all the cars were stopped to give the right

of way to the troops. The soldiers looked very well dressed; all their equipment was brand new, their yellow belts forming a clear-cut line on the green surface of their uniforms.

It was by now an hour since we had started. In normal circumstances we should already have been somewhere near Stara Wies or Minsk Mazowieck, but to-day was different. We were glad to reach the turning near Waver, where there was a level-crossing. In my imagination I always associated that point with the end of Warsaw and the beginning of the real countryside. In actual fact we were a few miles away from the capital, but the road was as congested as if we were in its busiest street.

We were stopped for some time in front of the barrier, as the crossing was closed while they assembled a goods train. The railwaymen explained that the bombs had done so much damage to the eastern railway stations that some wagons had to be shunted in the smaller stations. This naturally was not a quick business and annoyed the great crowd already assembled at the barrier.

"Those baby-killers and barbarians," said a railwayman, "try to cut our communications. They keep on bombing the railway tracks and bridges. If it were not for the excellent work of the repair squads of sappers and mobile railwaymen it would be impossible to run one single train in the whole of Poland. Yesterday, near Kutno and Zychlin, they were at work nearly as soon as the Heinkel bombers had disappeared."

"They will never succeed in keeping us down," added a sturdy, bewhiskered captain (twin brother of Colonel Blimp). "They will be choked with Poland; and we are not the Czechs, who gave up their country without fighting."

Meanwhile the crowd at the crossing was growing larger and larger, but fortunately the shaft with its red lamp went up and the stream of traffic moved on. The road now led through a forest of magnificent pine trees. In the mass their trunks formed the lovely familiar colour of the Polish woods; dark and grey at the bottom and light brownish higher up. There were shadow and cover in these old forests, but the innumerable picnic parties which came out from Warsaw had destroyed most of the undergrowth. As we passed we could see large numbers of soldiers and horses



hiding from enemy aeroplanes. The woods of Waver, Anin, Goclawek were all alive with soldiers, horses and guns. They thought themselves safe there, but then the Germans hadn't yet started peppering the forests from the air. And probably their spies, who were so active through the whole campaign in Poland, hadn't yet had a chance of firing off their red or green rockets to indicate the exact hiding place of the Polish soldiers.

"There are masses of them," exclaimed little Marila. "Look, they are hidden on both sides of the road! How efficient they look!"

"They cannot show themselves on the road during the day and are probably waiting for night to march on," explained Mrs. Rikel. "If they could see them the German pilots wouldn't be loath to massacre them. Shooting from the air must be especially dangerous to moving troops and convoys. They cannot defend themselves, poor devils!"

Ahead of us were some soldiers busily entrenching themselves in the forest. Some were constructing shelters for the guns and emplacements for machine-guns, while junior officers directed the heavily loaded cars. The whole forest right up to Milosna was throbbing with activity and preparations for defence.

In the distance we saw an agile officer dancing about giving orders to the driver of a heavy military lorry. He seemed to be in a tremendous flurry for he was waving his arms about with ungainly gestures, looking not unlike an orchestra conductor in uniform. From this we concluded that he was probably an officer of the reserve. When we came a little nearer we saw that his rank was that of second lieutenant; his hair was fair, his face perspiring and covered with freckles, and he had a large, slightly crooked nose.

"Doesn't he look like a jumping bean?" was Marila's comment from her back seat.

"Gracious me!" exclaimed Zula. "I know him! That's Anthony Ager. He's a member of our tennis club and a very keen player, too. Shall we stop for a moment and say good evening."

"Better not, my child," replied mother. "He is on duty now

and we must hurry up, otherwise we shall arrive when it is dark and you know how I dislike that on principle."

"I can see that he must be very fond of tennis from the way he regulates the traffic. It is so funny to see him in uniform. In normal life he is a successful business man and rather a nice chap. But in uniform he looks so funny; and his big nose makes him look like an owl," said Mrs. Rikel.

As we approached Milosna the road became slightly less congested and driving a little easier. The number of pedestrians was decreasing, and now that they were no longer in enormous crowds we could distinguish them more clearly. Some were already in uniform, others had only forage caps and the rest were still in mufti. It was a melting pot of all sorts of people from all professions, all classes, all ages. Women accompanied the men, some of whom were carrying rifles, others armed with shot guns. The younger boys had clasp knives and bayonets hanging on their belts. Most people carried a bag or two or a rucksack with a change of linen and some food, and all marched with determination in the firm conviction that it would still be their privilege to serve their country, and believing that they would be recruited in some town farther east in mid-Poland. They had all left the city at the order of the authorities. Some of them walked by themselves, but the majority had spontaneously formed themselves into smaller or larger groups. It is the essence of human nature that it likes congregating and most people like to be commanded. There is plenty of scope for self-appointed dictators. Take the lead and most people will follow you.

We were reaching the crest of the big wave of refugees, most of whom had not yet reached the point where the road forked towards Brest Litovsk and Lublin.

"Look, mother," said Zula, "they seem to hesitate which way to choose. I am sure that many will pass through Viasno in the course of to-morrow."

"There will be a terrific wave of people when all those who leave to-day get going. If the bulk go by way of Wolka, they are bound to be in Viasno soon."

"I feel glad to think that when they are all passing we shall

be already at Viasno," added Zula. "Perhaps we shall be able to help some of them."

"They are like people on a holy pilgrimage," said Mrs. Rikel dramatically.

"They will feel terribly exhausted after a few days of marching," remarked Marila sympathetically. "How far will they have to go?"

With fewer people on the road the car could move a little faster. We passed a number of cars lying in the ditch. Some of them still looked serviceable and seemed to have been abandoned either because they had developed minor engine trouble or simply because they had run out of petrol, which was now in much greater demand even than whisky.

In front of us was a detachment of mounted field artillery. Each gun-carriage and limber was drawn by six horses and, judging by the clouds of dust they raised, there must have been at least two batteries. We had to crawl past them and Zula drew out a white handkerchief and waved to the soldiers. Her gay advances drew a melancholy smile from a few of them. Their expressions seemed to say:

"That is all very nice, pretty young lady. But soldiering is not such an amusing game as it may seem to you. We have already seen the Germans. We have some idea of their crushing, overwhelming power. We have been outflanked by them. Many of our comrades are killed and still more are wounded. Their wounds are not dressed; we have seen our best friends perish, while we were unable even to pick them up and bring them with us."

It was slowly growing dusk and it became increasingly difficult to distinguish the numerous vehicles, lorries, guns and detachments which we passed. Moreover, we were now going much faster. In the distance we could see the outlines of Kolka, that poor little Jewish hamlet planted just by the high road and living from it. Now we knew that Viasno was quite near and could look forward to supper.

At last we arrived at Viasno. The large gate into the park was open and the numerous tracks of motor car tyres and carriage

wheels betrayed that there had been considerable coming and going during the day. Our old gardener was at the gate.

"Good evening, Stanislaus! We decided to come back," cried mother from the car. "I hope everything is in order. We stuck in the traffic and had to move very slowly."

"Bless you, ma'am," the old man greeted her, taking off his hat. "Thank Heaven that you have arrived; and so many guests! . . . From the moment Miss Zula left Viasno we haven't had an hour to ourselves. The army is on the move and they always stop here for forage and the big house is always full of officers. We are working here for them like mules."

"Are there any officers in the house now," shouted Zula, for Stanislaus was nearly deaf.

"Oh, yes. There was a platoon of mounted police reserve from Warsaw, but they are leaving now."

Scarcely had he finished when we saw several police officers preparing for a night march. It was a strange feeling, coming to your own house just when its visitors were leaving. Mother and one of the servants started at once to prepare supper. We had all assembled in the kitchen, which was shrouded in semi-darkness, and were inhaling the smell of fried potatoes and scrambled eggs, when we heard the sound of a carriage outside in the yard and the familiar bass of our friend Mr. Lenart. He had just arrived with his wife from Legionowo in a little ramshackle vehicle drawn by one horse, which he drove himself. His gargantuan figure and face, like a beefsteak with a black moustache burned in the middle, formed a most amusing contrast to the frailty of the little grey horse and carriage which had brought them all that distance. His resonant voice was soon booming out blood-curdling tales of the approach of the Germans from the north and their own escape. Both Mr. and Mrs. Lenart were delighted to have found us here. They had brought a certain amount of food with them and, most important of all, a few bottles of beer, which was now unobtainable owing to the order in council prohibiting the sale of intoxicating liquor during the mobilization, which was still going on.

I SAW THE SIEGE OF WARSAW

"Dinner is on the table!" called mother. "Please come at once because the eggs will be cold."

Mr. and Mrs. Lenart were the first swallows, harbingers of a real swarm. But this was not to come until to-morrow.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARS IN A VILLAGE

GOING for a walk was not the sort of thing one did for choice in Warsaw during this speediest of all wars. Owing to the appalling frequency of the German air raids everyone tried to restrict their outings to the bare minimum. It was considered very unsafe to be out of doors, and even the more foolish did not like the prospect of being shepherded to the shelters when the alarm went, or of having to wait for hours in the *portes cochères* of the larger buildings. Those who had to go to their offices or whom business called from home deemed it wise to ring up their wives or families when they had got there safely. So numerous were the calls that the telephone system almost collapsed under the strain and we were requested many times by the wireless announcer to limit our conversations. The result of all this was that one did not go for a walk. Everybody who was not on duty or out shopping stayed at home or with friends.

Now that we were in the country the reaction was bound to come. It was a lovely night with a waning moon just shedding enough light to heighten the beauty of the old park and cover the tops of its trees with a shimmer of silver. The hosts of the September stars glittered gaily in the blue-black sky. Needless to say, we were only waiting for an excuse to go out—late as it was.

"Oughtn't we to go to Mr. Pazurski (the local teacher) and see if there was any news on the wireless to-night?" suggested Zula. "How silly we were to take ours back to town. We shall regret it now."

A minute later the large hall was empty. Mother alone stayed behind, for she had to act as domestic quarter-master with so many people arriving all at once. There were three of us, then

Mrs. Rikel with Marila, and now Mr. and Mrs. Lenart. But that was not all. We had scarcely left the house before an officer appeared in front of the verandah asking for accommodation for a number of officers and men from an evacuated ordnance factory, which was moving from Warsaw with its most valuable material to safer quarters. Poor mother had a terrific lot of work to do and beds to prepare, but it was too late now to send the gardener, Stanislaus, to the village for help. The officer explained that the first of the lorries with their material could be expected at Viasno any moment; while the rest would arrive in batches during the night and possibly even Thursday morning. He had no time for much discussion but told mother that it was the Ava factory they were evacuating, most of whose workers were highly skilled men. These men and their machinery were among the most precious assets Poland had for her defence, which was why they were being removed from the endangered Warsaw.

When we reached Mr. Pazurski's house, we found he had already gone to bed; but, all the same, he invited some of us in to listen to his set. Unfortunately he had no loud speaker and only two could listen at the earphones. The Warsaw news was already over, and all we could get were German stations, which blunt Mr. Lenart soundly cursed. However, Mrs. Rikel insisted on hearing what they had to say, lies though most of it was. While she and Zula listened, the rest of us stood round them trying to get them to repeat what was being said, for we, of course, could hear nothing. It was from Königsberg, where they were just giving the news in German. But what news! It must have been something gruesome, something dreadful. Both women looked terribly shocked; Mrs. Rikel was as pale as chalk, while Zula was shaking with indignation and clenching her hands.

"I cannot listen to it any more!" exclaimed Mrs. Rikel, "it hurts too much—it is more than anybody can stand." And she began to cry. I took the receivers quickly.

The German speaker was just boasting about the surrender of Cracow; he described the entry of the German troops into our old capital. But the worst blow of all to us, what really hurt most, was the news that after the capture of Cracow Hitler had

placed a guard of honour at the grave of Marshal Pilsudski in the Cathedral at Wawel Castle, the very heart of Poland. And to make the blow more cruel, more humiliating for every Pole, he had the impudence to pretend that Pilsudski was his friend and that as such he honoured him—with German occupation in that most Polish of all Polish towns!

It was impossible to listen any more. It was too painful for all of us. It shattered all our most sacred ideals and made us feel that we were the victims of a sadistic torturer. What ignorance of the Polish nature Hitler showed in doing that! He thought to break down our morale. Instead, he united against himself every Polish man and woman. Even those, like myself, who did not approve of all that Marshal Pilsudski had done, felt the insult in our very core. But we knew the Germans and were not surprised.

"Perhaps it is only a German lie," said Mr. Lenart, in an attempt to console us. But it was a very depressed and silent company that wended its way back to the house.

I was called several times during the night, and lorries full of cases and boxes were still arriving when the morning came. We had to put the cases where they would be safe, and as some of them contained valuable parts and semi-manufactured material necessary for the production of tele-communication apparatus, we stored these in the basement. But how on earth were we to find enough room for all these crates and boxes? True, the house was large, but it could never hold everything we unloaded from these four-ton trucks. Each convoy was under the command of a junior transport officer and the officer in charge of the whole evacuation arrived with one of these early in the morning.

Then in the distance I saw a figure giving orders and gesticulating fiercely as if he were playing a game of tennis. By Jove! that was Mr. Ager, the second lieutenant we had met struggling with his column of trucks in the forests of Milosna, when we were on our way to Viasno. What a pleasant surprise for Zula when she meets her old tennis partner at breakfast to-morrow. He accepted my suggestion that the large cases containing electric



machinery and dynamos should be put temporarily under the trees, where they would not easily be seen from the air. The prospect of having a well-deserved sleep spurred the workers on and the whole consignment was unloaded in no time. A few minutes later the whole house was sound asleep and only a sentry and the dogs on their chains kept vigil.

*Thursday, 7th September*

How nice, after seven anxious nights, are even a few hours of decent sleep. You are in good form again. This morning we heard that the news in the last communiqué of our General Staff was not so bad. A bag of seven planes was nothing to be ashamed of.

"Only, is it true?" asked my sceptical half. "Can we really be sure that our broadcasts do not mislead us? Why does what we hear from private sources differ so widely from the official version, and why do the Germans boast so much of their victories?"

There wasn't much to be learned from the officers. They invariably had "good" news and admitted even less than we already knew from the official broadcast. Well, they simply did not know. It did not take me long to discover that if one wished to get any idea of what was going on, it was no use questioning anyone below the rank of colonel. Even the colonels did not throw much light on the situation; not that they were either secretive or intentionally reserved, but they did not know themselves. Besides, it was not so very easy for me to win the confidence of colonels and generals. Who was I to them? Just an ordinary civilian who lent a helping hand to the various detachments which happened to be passing through Viasno. What business had I to ask questions?

Much more was to be learned by talking to the foremen and engineers from the evacuated factory. They were extremely nice people, and while I was helping them this morning to camouflage the large cases and boxes piled in front of the entrance with branches and weeds, they told me about the dreadful bombardment of their factory. The German Dorniers, Heinkels and other bombers had come in relays, discharging tons of bombs and causing

terrific damage. They had had to stay in their shelters for hours, quite unable to get on with any work at all. In such circumstances, the only thing the military authorities could do was to remove the men elsewhere and set them to work assembling what they had been able to save from the wreck. More workers, both men and women, some of them with families, were expected at Viasno to-day, and they hoped that they would take over the whole of our white house for a new assembling factory. These men are organized like a semi-military institution. Some of them are armed and these are put on guard over the cases and the store-rooms and our basement where they keep the dynamos. Two of the young boys are always beside our telephone which is their only means of communication with their major, who is stationed in an estate a few miles from Viasno.

When I went into the dining room, I saw that breakfast this morning would be an enormous affair and that several leaves would have to be put into the table if we were to accommodate all the visitors. As we only arrived last night, there was not food enough for all, but Stanislaus had been down to the village early to order bread from the baker in the Jewish part. As we had brought plenty of sausage with us and there was ample tea and sugar in the larder, we were able to give the whole party an excellent breakfast. In feeding so many mouths we were only doing what was being done in thousands of manors and cottages all over Poland. Soldiers and others engaged in national defence invariably found shelter and food, so long as there was either to be had. Later, when food became scarce, not only the owners of the larger estates, but also the poorest peasants shared their last loaf of bread with their guests. At Viasno every peasant and villager entertained as many soldiers as his means and accommodation allowed. All our friends had their houses full of guests, but they also fed the passing army. Soldiers, whether officers or men, were welcomed at every table. Mrs. Kulikowska of Olyna Manor had more than she could possibly accommodate; and our great friends the Siwinski's were also performing miracles of hospitality for the army. The parish priest of Viasno filled his vicarage to overflowing; our tenant, who occupied the building

in the orchard, took in at least ten soldiers and so did our gardener. One could even find soldiers in some of the houses in the Jewish settlement, a separate entity from the rest of the village, lying on the other side of the stream along the road leading to the old white church. Every corner of the countryside was throbbing with life and full of hospitality for the troops. When later, on top of this billeted army, there came the huge wave of refugees, they, too, found everywhere an open door, a kind word, and above all, a warm heart.

It was obvious that we could expect a large number for lunch. How many we did not know; but it would be wise to increase the stocks in our larder. When we were at Viasno we always bought our butter from Mrs. Gold, an old Jewish woman, whose husband, a tailor, had been dead for many years. Mrs. Gold never let us down and this time she managed to find us about ten pounds of butter, but it was quite clear that supplies were getting rather short. She warned mother to be extremely economical with all food, because for some reasons which she professed not to understand, it was becoming rather difficult to obtain supplies, even in Viasno. Poor thing! She did not realize the magnitude of the human wave which had left Warsaw and the western towns and was now spreading out along the roads leading eastwards from the Vistula. Had she seen the torrent of vehicles and people which we saw yesterday she would have understood. Yesterday we ourselves were a drop in it, to-day we shall witness the passage of its crest through Viasno.

Our park was near the road along which flowed one of the main branches of this human river. The first of them reached the village round about eleven o'clock, having left Warsaw two days previously. As in a tragic race the fittest and strongest arrived first—they were also the first to denude the shops, the restaurants, the inns and even the individual farms, of food and drink. As they advanced they ate everything, leaving empty stores and shops for those who followed. By mid-day our artesian well near the stables was besieged by thirsty hordes. Hundreds and later thousands of people branched off the main road to sit down for a moment in the shade of the trees and refresh themselves

with a draught of its iron-flavoured water. The wheel never stopped turning, revolved by pairs of robust hands, which changed every few minutes as people came and went. Most people had their own food with them and only inquired where they could have something cooked, or hot water to make tea or coffee. Only a few asked for food and most of these were ready to pay for it, being only anxious to know where it could be obtained. They were the fortunate ones. For those who came later money was of no avail.

We did what we could to help those who were in need, but our utmost efforts were no more than a drop in the ocean. We already had a number of officers to feed and a few officials from the evacuated factory. That in itself was a problem for mother, Zula and Mrs. Rikel. We were cooking food continuously and all the time new people trickled into the house asking for something to eat. The same thing was happening in all the neighbouring houses.

By about twelve o'clock our yard and all the benches round the house were crammed with people and more were continually arriving. Some were poor unemployed, others wealthy industrialists or their sons, some were artists, lawyers, engineers, skilled workers, tramwaymen—all united in a spirit of comradeship. Priests and barristers, metal-turners and waiters, poets and taxi-drivers, young and old—the whole world seemed to be passing through Viasno. Among them were many of our friends and acquaintances. One of the first I saw was Jan Posner, who had reached Warsaw from Geneva one day before the Germans attacked Poland. He was an old friend of mine and though an ardent pacifist and believer in Pan-European ideals, a great patriot. He had come back with the intention of joining the army, but ours was not an easy army to join. I knew something about that myself, having made so many unsuccessful attempts to volunteer for various jobs. For every vacancy there were always at least ten candidates. Everyone offered his services, yet few were fortunate enough to be given any work to do at all. All these crowds were now marching towards Garwolin, Lublin and Brest Litovsk, where they expected to be enrolled.

Jan came with a detachment of uniformed youths. He was the only one in mufti, and was excessively annoyed at not having been given a rifle, though I am sure he would not have known how to handle one. His unit was stationed in the village school, where, on straw strewn on the floor, they slept heavily after their long night march. They were not very sure where they were going, but went eastwards in the hope of being trained at some point farther on.

Jan was followed by a long string of others, our closer or more distant acquaintances and relatives. Alexander, a cousin, arrived in a car with his whole family of four and a nurse for his little son. The car was loaded with food and spare petrol, and the children sat perched on top of the luggage and bedding, making it look more like a gypsy's van than a modern car. Alexander was an officer of the reserve, but he had neither commission nor any idea what to do with himself and his family. He was in uniform, as he thought that travelling would be easier for an officer. Like many others, he took advantage of his uniform without having the chance of participating actively in this strange war.

Zula was very scornful about it and thought it unworthy that at such a moment he should think only of his family and himself, instead of trying to get a commission.

"Felix has been fighting from the very first day of the war," said she; "why is Alexander mucking about like a dirty coward?"

But it wasn't really Alexander's fault that he was not yet mobilized. Many thousands were in the same position. The retreat was so sudden that there had been no time for the authorities to call up all the man power of the country, with the consequence that a vast army of officers and men in uniform were wandering about separated from their units. Such a situation, of course, allowed plenty of room for abuse and it also facilitated the work of the German agents and wreckers, who were already becoming active. Moreover, the lack of proper discipline and supervision was a direct incentive to looting. I had to admit to Zula that the picture of officers taking their wives and children to safety instead of being with their colours was sad and of ill

omen. We had not seen that aspect of the war when we were in Warsaw.

Every minute brought more newcomers to swell the numbers in our house. Some only wanted to sit for a little in the armchairs in our hall; some asked if they could wash; others wanted a little hot water to fill their flasks with tea; some only came to ask whether we had a wireless and whether any further instructions had been issued by the authorities in Warsaw, while others wanted news; but the bulk came to *eat*. Most people were too shy to enter the house, still having their pre-war reluctance to invade other people's habitations. They were still coming direct from their own homes, where they knew that they wouldn't like to be disturbed; but, above all, they had not as yet made close acquaintance with hunger and exhaustion. As they advanced and time went on, they quickly discarded those trammels, the relics of peace time.

The instinctive desire of these people to preserve themselves and their families now brought their real nature to the surface. In no circumstances does a man expose his real nature and qualities more than when he is in danger. One can read his character then like an open book in which all is said, and good and bad inexorably divided. This may, perhaps, be the reason why the friendships men make in the trenches or in prisons are such lasting bonds. At such times there is no veil and no disguise.

Just before lunch I saw Jurek Lekanski arrive on a bicycle. It came out later that he had stolen it outside a chemist's shop some 15 miles from Viasno. At Viasno he met his uncle, a rich financier, who was going back to Warsaw to fetch his wife and son. Jurek had taken the opposite direction. His uncle was loaded with money which he had withdrawn in time, before the restrictions on bank deposits were imposed. Jurek told him that he was rather short of money, a statement which would strike anyone who knew him as probably a lie. But what was the value of money in such circumstances? I saw his uncle handing Jurek a packet of banknotes, enough in normal times to buy a small farm.

The dining-room was full of guests. Mother had made a beef

and vegetable stew—that miraculous dish which satisfies the hunger of the largest possible number of people. This mountainous, steaming stew, together with bread and butter, constituted our lunch. In the circumstances it was a royal feast.

While we were at lunch, we witnessed a moving scene; the arrival of a party of university professors from Warsaw. Most of them elderly, bearded gentlemen, they had been dislodged from their laboratories and seminar rooms by the advance of barbarism and like those scientists of old had, at the cost of great physical strain, turned their backs on this new Byzantium. They were very humble and really grateful for the least attention. At first they refused our offers of food, but no great pressure on mother's part was required to induce them to change their minds. Indeed, they were very hungry and tired out. This was the first scene of the kind, which is probably why I remember it so well, but there was a similar one later in the day when we entertained a group of judges on the tramp—judges of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal. All these men, highly respected, full of learning and merit, were forced to flee before the mailed fist of the enemy and begin a long trek into the unknown. How many will ever return to their homes and to their desks?

The tide of people passing through Viasno was continually rising. Before long it was impossible to buy anything in the whole village beyond tomatoes, of which the crop had been good this year. Most people picked and ate them. The bakeries at Viasno were not capable of turning out large quantities and the impatient crowd so threatened one baker that he decided to close down—so he baked no bread that evening. The other baker was still at his job, but he had to call the police several times to keep order and to stop the continuous skirmishing outside his shop. Everybody wanted to buy bread, but there was not enough for all.

Similar scenes could be seen outside the wells. Most wells in the Polish countryside are not deep. They are lined with wooden boards or logs, and most of them have cranes, the long necks of the levers ending in a horse-shoe, which serves to draw up the pails. The supply of water, however, is limited. How could

it possibly be enough to quench the thirst of so many thousands of people, soldiers and horses on such a warm day?

Stanislaus called out when he saw me approaching the stables:

"The well's burst. I think the joint of the rod has been broken by all that pumping, and the blacksmith refuses to come."

"Why, Stanislaus?"

"He says he hasn't got the tools to put it right; but I think there is a different reason. Everybody says that he has buried all his tools in the garden, because he is afraid that if the Germans come to Viasno they will steal them, as they did when they were here in 1915. Then they gave him some sort of receipt, but the tools . . . he's never seen them again."

"We cannot stay without water here, Stanislaus. This is really serious. I'll speak to the chief engineer of the evacuated factory. I am sure one of their joiners or fitters will be able to help us."

In the meantime we had to do without running water. And what little water we had was kept carefully locked in a bathroom and portioned out as though it were medicine.

Life at Viasno was becoming rapidly more and more disorganized. In the evening our small police force received the alarming order to quit the station at once. No reason was given. Surely the Germans couldn't be near Viasno yet. The evacuated factory was still there and they hadn't heard anything to alarm them. On the contrary, the men had installed an excellent wireless set with a long aerial stretching from the small white house to the old chestnut tree, and on this we heard the announcement from Warsaw that the French had broken the Siegfried Line at seven points and that the Allied troops were pouring into Germany. Could any news be better? Could there be anything more cheering? We knew that the French meant business. This would be no joke for the Germans; and think of the marvellous exploits of the British Air Force which bombed Hamburg a few days ago! Yet, why had our police station been evacuated?

People coming by car from Warsaw told that the bridges were still being bombed, but few direct hits had been scored. One or two bombs had fallen on the Prince Poniatowski Bridge, but they merely broke holes in it and exploded in the water. The



damage had already been repaired and the bridge was in use again. The authorities were no longer allowing people to carry parcels, for fear they might have explosives in them. We also heard that the defences of Warsaw were now being prepared at top speed and that when the energetic Mayor, Stefan Starzynski, had asked for 8000 volunteers for the defence battalions, the numbers had been made up within two hours. It was obvious now that the authorities in Warsaw were no longer encouraging evacuation, but preparing to put up a stout resistance. All able-bodied men and women were set to dig trenches and emplacements for machine-guns and anti-tank guns round Warsaw. We also heard that the German planes had damaged one of the railway stations and dropped leaflets calling upon the people to surrender. What impudence and what a waste of paper! One of the men told me that he had definite information from very high quarters that one thousand British aeroplanes were expected to reach Poland at any moment.

Oh, how I wished it were true! Yet, why did our police leave Viasno?

Our house was full of people all the evening and many asked to stay overnight. Our cousin, Alexander, and his family, however, left for Zamosc in the evening, with yet another added to their already enormous load in the person of a friend, who had to cling to the spare wheel at the back of the car. The news that the police had been ordered to leave Viasno had robbed them of any desire to stay. The departure of the Alexanders alarmed Mrs. Rikel and the Lenarts. The latter went in their little carriage, while Mrs. Rikel and her daughter were taken in a military convoy. They all thought that by going east they would find greater safety. Will that really be so? God only knows!

It was most instructive to see what the various people brought with them in their slender rucksacks or in their pockets. Some of them had a full load of victuals, others warm clothes. One man left Warsaw with only an album of photographs taken on his travels—nothing else! Zula and I very much enjoyed skimming over its pages, but thought it a strange substitute for luggage at such a moment. Some people had suit cases and leather bags,

many of them brand new and much too heavy. So they were grateful if we could give them an ordinary jute bag or sack in exchange for their expensive luggage.

Zula, returning from one trip to the cellar for such an old sack, remarked: "This is the way we can make a fortune!"

Indeed one could have fitted oneself out from top to toe by walking along the main road and picking up the discarded objects which the fugitives, from fatigue, had been forced to throw away. Shaving soap, shirts, pullovers, shoes, pyjamas, slippers—there was no end to what was lying in the dust. To save their lives people will discard their property.

The tavern at Viasno had been doing a roaring trade, but had to close its doors when the crowd manhandled the owner. He could only serve a small fraction of his would-be customers.

When night fell over Viasno our house was filled to overflowing with people. They were in every room, even in the hall and in the laundry. They slept on the sofas, on the beds, on the armchairs, on the floor.

*Friday, 8th September*

Two a.m. brought a distinguished visitor, the *starosta* (sheriff) of our county and his wife. They came by car, as he was on a tour of inspection of the county. He was one of those conscientious and energetic administrators who took great pains to keep "business as usual" as far as circumstances allowed, and he was greatly upset when we told him that the police had left, and assured us that it was entirely unnecessary. I told him about the closing of the local inn, butchers' shops in the Jewish settlement, and both bakers. His reaction to this news was vigorous and reassuring. Here was a man who was not thinking of his own skin.

After a few hours of sleep, we all met again at breakfast and felt cheered by the brightness of the morning. When we were half-way through the meal, the door opened and in came the senior police constable of Viasno obsequiously reporting to the sheriff, who told him how disgusted everybody in Viasno was that the police were the first to leave the place.

The sheriff had something important to tell me.

"It is the aim of the authorities to keep life behind the front line as normal as possible. I am doing my utmost to prevent panics and false rumours. The police in my county have already been alarmed several times and as soon as one post is abandoned on the news that the German tanks are advancing, they telephone to the others, with the result that they all leave their duties, though often the enemy is scores of miles away. It must be stopped at all costs and, as you see, my wife and I are travelling night and day trying to put things right. But local initiative is required. We cannot rely alone on orders issued centrally, especially now that communications are so badly interrupted, so in many places we are forming the local people into Civic Guards to help the police and perform various duties arising out of military operations. You have probably heard that the Germans are dropping soldiers by parachute, some of them with bicycles, and their wreckers and spies are everywhere. They are a perfect plague and we are continually having to clear them out from the rear of the army. Then the enormous movement of population from the evacuated areas presents grave problems. There is much hardship and suffering which we must relieve as far as we can. The movement of troops presents additional difficulties; in particular that of deserting and vagabond soldiers. Sanitary problems loom large and must also be tackled energetically. You've grasped the position and I count on your help in Viasno and the surrounding districts."

That was a proud moment. At last I should be able to do something for my country. Here was a job really worth doing. And so I became Commanding Officer of the Civic Guard at Viasno. I ceased to be an ordinary civilian, a mere spectator. When I meet Felix one day I shall be able to tell him that I too worked for the country.

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The day is lovely and warm. There is not a cloud in the sky. The soil is as dry as pepper and the sun sheds a rich gold over the fields of potatoes and tomatoes on either side of the beaten track. Hundreds stop to gather some of the red tomatoes with which to quench their thirst and fill their hungry stomachs. Every-

body in Poland prays for rain, but Providence is against us.

This dry weather and clear sky have greatly facilitated the movements of the German mechanized columns. Fields are hard and swamps dry; there is nothing to hinder their progress. Those defences, which were constructed to link up with the natural ones of bog and marsh, have completely failed, for the chain is broken. We had always believed that while the Polish cavalry would be able to operate in boggy soil, the enemy's tanks would stick in the mud. Had the Germans any cavalry worth speaking of? We did not know. We never heard anything of it. The cloudless sky, moreover, was a tremendous asset to the enemy's reconnaissance from the air. He could see us all the time, could watch every movement and every attempt to concentrate forces or material. We could hide nothing from his Argus-like air force. Of course, the fine weather was just as favourable to our air force, but the enemy's crushing superiority made it quite useless. Only a very limited number of our machines were still on active service. The lovely golden September sun shone in Poland, unfortunately only for the German pilots; it was not of much avail to us. A grey screen of clouds was what we were all praying for. We in Poland wanted rain, rain, rain!

The German reconnaissance planes flew with impunity over the whole country. We have had several of them over Viasno to-day. At first they flew ominously high, but soon they became cheeky, and, finding that there were no guns in the district, came down to about 3000 feet or less. The entire defences of Viasno consisted of one heavy machine gun which was stationed outside the school where Jan Posner and his group stayed last night, and very glad I was to see it there. At the beginning of the war we were always trying to distinguish the colours and markings of the planes to see which were enemy; but now few even took the trouble: whenever aeroplanes were heard we took it for granted that they were German.

The writing of my diary was interrupted many times in the course of the morning; one of the officers wanted my advice as to where he could best secure forage for his horses; I had to sign several letters inviting the local farmers and peasants to the pre-

liminary meeting of our Civic Guard; Zula came to tell me that she wanted to finish the trench in the park, because there were so many enemy planes about. Would I come and see it? Then Stanislaus arrived with the news that the workers from the evacuated factory had repaired the well, but that we must put a sentry over it to prevent the recurrence of such a mishap, which might leave us completely without water. The crowd at the well was still so big that one could not leave it to itself; someone had to keep order and see that irresponsible people did not turn the wheel too quickly. As our Civic Guard was not yet organized I asked the engineer from the evacuated factory to place some of his men there, for they had absolutely nothing to do the whole day long and were scattered all over the park sunbathing or helping Zula to dig the air-raid shelter. She has a genius for enlisting helpers.

At the well I found an air force pilot drinking from the mug. He had a limp and walked with the help of a stick. His leg had been hurt in a forced landing after a fight with two German machines. I asked whether he would care to go up to the house and have something to eat and rest his foot, and after some persuasion induced him to come. He was really very hungry. His one ambition was to get a new machine and have another go at the Germans in order to avenge the first defeat. When I asked whether he could fly with a bad foot, he looked at me with a glint in his eye and sorrowfully said:

"If only I had a machine! . . . Oh, I could fly! My foot—that is nothing."

But that was the tragic "if" of Poland. If we had had the aeroplanes things would have looked so different. There were hundreds of young trained pilots, observers and gunners dying to get hold of planes, but unfortunately most of those we had were destroyed in the first German attacks, and Marshal Smigly-Rydz was keeping those that were left in final reserve.

The lame pilot told me about our own planes the Germans had smashed on the aerodromes in the first surprise attacks. They included our heavy bombers, "The Elks," and light bombers, "The Carps," and our fighters.

"They're easily a match for the German Dorniers, Heinkels and Junkers. If I could pilot one of our machines I would make the Jerry crew count their bones in the mud. We cannot rely only on ground defences. Our anti-aircraft guns, which we made ourselves, are extremely accurate. Our gunners are good shots. But what can we do without enough fighters? Mine was such a lovely machine and it broke my heart to see her smashed. I was unconscious at the time and when I came to it was all over. Now, what is the good of a pilot without machine and with a broken leg?"

While I was talking to the wounded airman, mother and Zula were entertaining several air force officers at the house. They were touring round collecting information about the number and location of smashed planes. One of them, a captain, was a jovial man in the forties with his hair shorn close to the skin, hiding a large bald scalp like a pancake on the top of his head. He was the old-fashioned type of officer, having served in the Russian Imperial Army during the Great War. He talked a lot and very loudly, exposing a gold tooth, and always bragging about his various exploits. He told mother that it was an entirely unnecessary precaution to black out the rooms as the little light from our paraffin lamp could not be seen from the air, and mother gave him a sympathetic ear, for she hated the black-out herself. Unfortunately, the captain's pleasant advice was politely contradicted by the major, who told mother definitely to be careful with the light. Sandwiches and meat broth were served for the officers, and the captain displayed an ogreish appetite, only interrupting his guzzling from time to time to boast of his past achievements and gallantry or to flatter the helping women.

His fellow officers must have known these stories by heart, because they all yawned and one of the lieutenants suddenly changed the subject and began telling us about the retreat from Bydgoszcz, where the German minority sniped the retreating Polish soldiers from the windows and roofs.

As we were talking, we became aware of a faint buzz and soon the roar of aeroplanes passed over our house, enemy ones hunting in the clear sky. That self-confessed hero, the loquacious captain,

changed suddenly beyond recognition. He became panicky and ran to the window. Before long the enemy disappeared on the distant horizon.

"You look blue," said Zula, teasing. "Have you remembered one of your heroic deeds?"

"Oh, no! I am only suffering from an attack of megrim, that's all," answered the captain.

"In that case I will fetch you an aspirin, or even better, two pills. I hope it will be a good cure for the effects of air raids," laughed Zula and disappeared upstairs.

Mother did not like this mockery or the silence that followed Zula's last remark, and suggested that some of the officers might care to inspect our trench, in the digging of which by now nearly everybody had taken a turn. It was near the kennels and we found a few workers from the evacuated factory killing time by digging. The ground round about was littered with paper, boxes and other odds and ends which the people passing through Viasno had left in the park, especially under the trees where they had hidden from the raiders. I told Stanislaus and one of the farmhands to make a heap of the rubbish and burn it. But when they set fire to one of the heaps, a gendarme jumped out of the bushes, told them off severely and threatened to have them court-martialled for giving signals to the enemy. I had to take the blame on my own shoulders and explain that I gave the order merely with the intention of keeping the park tidy and of preventing the spread of infection. No possible harm could have been done, especially during mid-day when the flame could not be seen. But I agreed that we had to be extremely careful in the future, in view of the infinite number of German spies.

The Germans employed a large number of spies and saboteurs in Poland. They spied upon the army and directed the movements of the enemy by indicating the positions of our troops: they caused trouble behind the lines, severing the telegraph and telephone wires and railway lines, sniping our men in the most unexpected places, directing the enemy raiders, issuing false orders and giving out false information. There was no end to the things they did on the orders of the German command, and their work

was greatly helped by the existence of a German minority, which was well acquainted both with the country and the language. It had certainly taken months, if not years to school and organize these people of whom the German command was now making such effective use. In tolerating the German minority and in treating them with humanity and due consideration for their rights, Poland had bred a viper in her bosom. Most of these spies worked in disguise, one of their favourites being that of a priest. The Germans well knew the attachment of the Polish peasants to the Catholic religion and abused it to the full. I have already seen several of these "priests" being conducted under escort into the town. One of them was caught at Minsk Mazowiecki filming the movement of troops from the church spire.

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The inaugural meeting of the Civic Guard was held in our house in the afternoon.

"In the name of the Polish Republic and with the authority of the sheriff," said I to the standing peasants with fitting solemnity, "I invited you here, gentlemen . . ."

Then we came down to business and very quickly each had his duties assigned to him. The wife of one of the farmers had already prepared the white and red arm bands, on which the commander and his deputy were to have rosettes.

One of our first duties was to secure a regular supply of bread by reopening the bakeries. Under the protection of the Guard and the police the evening baking went on as usual and the kneaded dough went into the hot oven, to emerge a few hours later as delicious steaming loaves, which we sold to the people and the soldiers.

We tried to restore life to normal and keep the daily services going. The bakeries were the first step; but the supply of flour was sufficient only for two days of continuous baking. Our bakers had tiny old-fashioned ovens of very limited capacity, and so, at much inconvenience to themselves and in spite of its being Friday evening, when normally they would start celebrating the Sabbath,



they worked hard and sold the bread without profit. I really admired the spirit of service they displayed.

Coming home off duty I was called to the telephone. There was an important message from Warsaw. Marshal Smigly-Rydz had ordered that the capital was to be defended: "The honour of Poland depends on Warsaw." Its defence had been entrusted to General Czuma. Posters had been plastered all over the city saying that it would be defended to the last soldier, to the last round of ammunition.

The position was now clear. We have a definite plan of action. The Germans will founder over Warsaw; here they will be stopped. They must not be allowed to cross the Vistula south of Warsaw in the district of Grojec, where they are pushing hard.

Warsaw will be defended! It will fight! It will defend the name of Poland!

As a sad illustration to these words I saw a glow in the late evening sky; not of the sunset, but of an enormous fire somewhere in Warsaw.

*Saturday, 9th September*

There is nothing more dangerous in framing one's own judgments than wishful thinking. We in Poland have been always guilty of that mistake and have often substituted wishes for hard facts. Personally, I never believed that miracles happen just when they are most needed, but how can one shut one's mind to hope when everybody says and believes that they will happen? It was persistently circulated in Poland that the ninth day of September would prove to be a "black day" for Hitler. Why? No one knew. But the people said it to the soldiers and the soldiers repeated it to the people. The news passed from mouth to mouth, it was whispered everywhere, and everybody asked: "What will happen to Hitler to-day?" I felt convinced that at least something would happen.

I was knocked up at six o'clock when a messenger of the Civic Guard arrived hot-foot from the village to say that the crowd had broken into both bakeries. There wasn't enough bread. I ordered the messenger to mobilize at once all the farmers living

in the neighbourhood who were members of the Guard, and to notify the police station. When I arrived on the spot, Mr. Pazurski, my deputy, was already there in his yellow linen jacket with the arm band. In reality the position was not so dangerous. The sentry, with admirable presence of mind, had asked some non-commissioned officers who came for bread to help him in keeping order and promised, in accordance with the old Roman principle—service for service—to let them have extra loaves free. With this improvised reinforcement he was able to keep the crowd in check, while they waited for the bread to bake. We could satisfy a great part of the demand, but quite a number had to go without or else come back in a few hours' time, when the oven was emptied again. This caused a certain amount of dissatisfaction and swearing, especially among those who were only passing through Viasno.

"We shall have to do something about it," said I to Mr. Pazurski. "We cannot allow that sort of scene to occur again. We must try to let as many people as possible have bread and for that some sort of rationing will be absolutely vital. I think we can discuss the best way of doing that at our meeting to-day."

Mr. Pazurski and I presently set off to the village to invite the vicar and more farmers to attend the meeting. We wanted every section of opinion to be with us and the support of the vicar was, of course, desirable. We felt that we should need all the able-bodied men in Viasno to co-operate with us. As we walked along talking about the best way of appealing to all the peasants and squires in the district, we met strong detachments of our cavalry massing and converging on Viasno. They looked extremely smart in their grey-green uniforms and square caps with straps under their chins and both lancers and horses seemed fresh. There was a great number of them and they made a fine sight, very different from the convoys and those monotonous rows of lorries drawn by bored horses in charge of lazy-looking drivers. With them were our small Polish tanks, those baby-tanks which were ideal for co-operating with cavalry in attacks on infantry. In front of us were innumerable files of lancers stretching a long way on the road to Viasno. It was a whole regiment, part of

a brigade that was still relatively intact and had not yet engaged the enemy.

The staff of the brigade chose Viasno as its war headquarters. Its different detachments were quartered all over the place and the surrounding villages, which gave us the feeling that the front was now getting near. The brigade was commanded by General Anders, whose chief-of-staff was Count Soltan. The general himself and some of the officers stopped at our house. Mars, god of war, had come to Viasno.

I was really surprised that we were allowed to stay in the house at all and occupy our bedrooms and the dining-room. Nearly all the rooms downstairs were turned into offices and sentries were placed all over the manor. The unfortunate engineers and foremen from the evacuated factory, who still had nothing to do, were told to quit and naturally found all the best places elsewhere already taken by others. In the meantime a few men from the Signals installed a number of additional telephone lines, which were buzzing away half an hour after the Staff had taken the house over. Soldiers guarded all the entrances to the park, but there were no sentries along the side which joined the fields and, as there was no fence there, anybody could have walked in whenever they liked.

Very soon after the brigade had taken possession, the house looked like a bee-hive. There was a constant stream of officers arriving by car. They gave their names to the gendarme at the entrance and were ushered inside without much delay. They were all in a hurry and their boots covered with thick dust. This was not manoeuvres, it was action. Many of them did not stop longer than a few minutes and, though mother asked a number to have something to eat, it was only those who were waiting for the General to arrive who could spare the time.

These men gave one the impression of being well aware of the enormous responsibility which had been put in their hands and of having assumed it with nobility and seriousness. They constituted a vital link in the defence of Warsaw from the right bank of the Vistula. I did not know, of course, where the theatre of their operations was, but I suspected that they were being partly

withheld from action in readiness for any emergency which might endanger Warsaw. The Germans had not yet forced the Vistula south of the city, and every possible effort was to be made to prevent that. As we saw the situation at that time, Warsaw was defended by General Czuma, the right bank of the Vistula by General Zulauf, other generals held the ring immediately round Warsaw, while the cavalry group of General Anders formed part of the reserves maintained to harass the enemy's line of march.

About General Anders and his cavalry brigade I had already heard wonders during those numerable conversations which one had with friends in the cafés of Warsaw before the war. Now he had more than a brigade. An additional unit was under his command led by Colonel Karcz. I was eager to see the general and felt he was a symbol of the approaching reality of war. This approach produced in me almost a sense of satisfaction. I am sure it was one of those purely irrational reactions, but it did exist at the time.

There was still an hour or two before the meeting of our Civic Guard, which was fixed for three o'clock. I got into conversation with the chaplain of the brigade and he told me his adventures and where they had been during the last few days. He had a great admiration for the general, whose popularity among the officers was enormous. We were interrupted because the chaplain had to go to Otwock village to officiate at the burial of three airmen.

"I very much doubt," said I, "whether the Germans would give Christian burial to our airmen, whereas we do this for our invaders whenever possible."

But the chaplain's face grew suddenly sad:

"I certainly would officiate for Germans. These three, however, are Poles."

I was now alone and went off to see whether the sentries we had placed outside the school and the bakery were there. I was not quite sure whether there was any need for our sentries in places which might be of military importance, but as I had been instructed not to mention the fact that our house was now the headquarters of General Anders, I had no excuse to remove them.

My way lay across the park, but instead of taking the nearest route, I went first to take a look at our trench and from there I walked towards some clumps of shrubs, young maples and planes which were overgrown with ivy so thickly that they almost formed a little jungle. I was still thinking about the funeral of those three unfortunate airmen, when suddenly it seemed to me that something moved in the thicket. . . . What could that be? As I had my antique fowling piece with me, I loaded both barrels with shot and blew my whistle, expecting that it was probably some stray dog (I was always afraid of rabies at that time of the year). But what was my surprise when I saw an unfortunate beggar, a hunchback, emerging out of the thicket. I thought at first that he was probably one of the enormous crowd which had passed through Viasno and that he had stayed in the park unnoticed by the sentries, enjoying a long rest. Without looking more carefully at his face I told him that he must leave.

"I am just going to our bakery," said I. "If you want some bread come with me."

"Oh no, I do not feel hungry," answered the hunchback in a way which seemed to betray some sort of nervous embarrassment.

At that moment a gendarme, brought by my whistle, appeared in front of us.

"He is not hungry, he says!" shouted the gendarme with furious sarcasm. "Look at the thick snout of that Schvabian pig." Upon which, with his heavy boot, he gave him a powerful kick in the hump. I was about to rebuke the gendarme when a large box fell from beneath the man's overcoat. The hump had gone, but at our feet lay a portable wireless set of military design. So he was a spy. . . . I had helped to catch a German spy. It was then no legend about those spies. We had really got one red-handed. I did not want to have anything more to do with him; to witness the further short stages of his wretched life was too unpleasant for a beginner like myself. After all, I hadn't yet killed anybody in my life.

The spy muttered a few words. Were they in German or Polish? Was he swearing at the Poles who had caught him before Hitler had had time to triumph, or mumbling a prayer.

I don't know. Nobody will ever know. I watched him disappearing with the gendarme and a little while later two dry clicks like those of logs crackling in the fireplace could be distinctly heard.

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"We come now to the agenda of our meeting, ladies and gentlemen." I looked round the council room at the respectable citizens of Viasno. Near me sat Mr. Pazurski, the teacher; next to him I noticed the thin face and ginger moustache of the assistant-secretary of the borough council, Mr. Mucha, the moving spirit in our local administration, and beyond them I could recognize the faces of various peasants—Mr. Kotarski, Mr. Sakowski, Mr. Wielgos, the richest farmer in the district, Mr. Szulc, whom his enemies always accused of being a German colonist and sympathetic to Hitler, Mr. Grynberg, with his patriarchal beard, represented the Jewish settlement and as he was brother-in-law of one of the bakers, his advice was invaluable, for the supply of bread was one of the main subjects of our discussion. We could have invited the bakers, but they were uneducated people and could scarcely speak Polish, which Mr. Grynberg did fluently. Among the others was Mrs. Kulikowska, the owner of the Olyna manor. She was one of those extremely energetic and progressive women, so frequently found among the landed class in Poland. Theirs was the prevalent type; they were promoters of culture, welfare and education. Exceptions of course existed, but too much capital had been made out of them by the advocates of drastic agrarian reform.

Among those present was a queer fellow from Warsaw, who called himself doctor. No one knew him at Viasno. He had arrived a few days before with the big wave of refugees and settled here. According to himself he worked in the Food Office of the county of Warsaw. He showed no desire to do duty as a Civic Guard, but he wanted to create a separate food authority at Viasno independent of, but co-operating with, the Civic Guard. His intentions, however, were only too obvious to most of us, and we made a complete fool of him, showing that what he was interested in was merely to gain access to the food supplies in

order to make sure that his own needs would be properly looked after. He did not come any more to our meetings.

The chief difficulty with regard to bread was the inadequate supply of flour and the need for a strong guard outside the bakeries, which were now besieged both day and night. They needed protection not so much from the local people or even the tide of civilians flowing through the village, which was now beginning to ebb, as from the errant soldiery, the marauders. There was plenty of corn in the farms, for the Government had some weeks ago ordered that as much corn should be thrashed as possible. The difficulty was rather the milling. We had a number of water mills at Viasno, but owing to the dry weather the level of the water was too low to allow of their working normally and we had to fall back on the old diesel mill at Polica. Mr. Kotarski and Mr. Wielgos undertook to inquire whether the miller had enough oil to start milling, while Mr. Sakowski, with some of our younger members, promised to organize the convoy of the flour from the mill to the bakers. We planned it all carefully to prevent any possible pilfering on the road. A strong detachment of the Civic Guard was detailed for the work and it was decided that some of them should be armed.

This immediately brought up the sore question of authority and arms. Most people had deposited their guns and firearms with the authorities on the outbreak of war, and there were only a few who had even shot-guns—only those who had not obeyed the law. However, the crime was not so serious and I exhorted all who had not yet deposited their arms with the police not to be shy about it but to report it to me so that I might renew their licences or issue new ones.

Several people immediately declared that they still possessed arms and were, in fact, delighted to be able to rectify their conduct now by obtaining their licences. Unfortunately, however, the majority had parted with theirs and the question of our arms still remained open.

Someone had the excellent idea of organizing an information service for all those using the roads, and we decided to have some of our young boys stationed on the roads near Viasno for

that purpose. Mr. Pazurski, however, felt sceptical; he thought that the mothers would probably forbid their young boys to leave the farms, as they were too scared of the air raids.

Mrs. Kulikowska suggested that we could operate a little clinic for out-patients. There were so many cases of sore feet and of minor fractures among the passing soldiers that it would be of immense value if Viasno could have such a station. There was a qualified nurse here and, with the help of a few scouts, who had come from Warsaw, it would be possible to inaugurate a clinic at the old health centre. This proposal met with unanimous approval and it was decided that Mrs. Kulikowska and the nurse should approach the military authorities for the necessary supply of medicaments. At the end of the meeting Mr. Mucha, our secretary, handed everybody their membership cards.

Arriving home in the evening I saw some soldiers cutting branches and twigs in the park and with them covering all the flat spaces of the house so as to make it less visible from the air. The general had not yet arrived, though everybody expected him to reach Viasno that night. The officers, having finished their day's work, were congregated in small groups in the corners of our hall talking, while they awaited the evening orders. There was no harm in joining them now.

"The German wireless was boasting that Warsaw had been captured by an armoured division," said one.

"I was in Warsaw to-day and they laughed when they heard the news. Mayor Stefan Starzynski, the Civil Commissioner of the Warsaw defence, denied it on the wireless."

"But they are within range of Warsaw."

"They are coming, I think, by the way south from Gora Kalwarja."

Zula was sitting talking with a tall, handsome lieutenant, whose large head was covered with curly fair hair. He gave me the impression of being cocksure of himself and there was about him a touch of that unpleasant casualness which, mixed with a certain amount of conventionality, makes people and conversations unattractive.



Zula interrupted the conversation to introduce me and then they resumed their talk. She was evidently out for his blood:

"So, you say we got fourteen of them. What are you going to do with these prisoners?"

"Oh, we'll keep them well occupied, don't you worry. First we'll give them a good smattering of Polish. They pretend that they cannot understand. Well, I'll speak to them, and I bet you they will be fluent linguists before long," at which he struck the leg of his boot several times with his cane.

"Are you going to beat them?" continued Zula, undeterred by his swaggering attitude.

"I will stroke their heads and I'll speak to them as a father to his children. It will make some of them cry," was the answer, spoken in such a way that one really did not know whether the man was a sadist or merely meant to have a heart to heart talk with them.

There was still a little time before dinner, so I went to my room to write up my diary, which lay on the table beside the rucksack I tried to keep always packed and ready.

It is remarkable how society always selects the most suitable agents for its various functions. Of all the officers I met at Viasno, none, I felt sure, would derive any enjoyment from having to cope with the prisoners. That man was an exception. He would do the job with pleasure, so it was just he who was selected for it.

There was still enough daylight left to write by.

The night was warm and pleasant. The pond in the old park reflected the sickle of the harvest moon and from time to time late shooting stars frolicked across the sky. There is an old peasant saying that if you can make a wish in the short time the star takes to fall, that wish will be granted. I had mine ready and waited for the next star to fall, so that I might wish victory for the civilization for which we were fighting. But was it cheating? Were you allowed to prepare your wish beforehand?

I reached a spreading oak, hundreds of years old, and sat down on a white bench which had been put there on grandfather's sixty-fifth birthday. It was one of my favourite spots. Turning my eyes, I saw two figures slowly approaching in the distance.

The man was an officer, but the girl I did not recognize. They walked side by side, absorbed in each other. The girl was weeping and the officer took his handkerchief from his pocket, wiped her eyes and kissed her hand, then her eyes and her lips. Her tears ceased and she leaned against him, her body still shaken by sobs. Suddenly they stopped and listened. From the direction of Warsaw came the sound of guns. Dull reports coming at intervals of about five minutes—one, two, three shots, then silence. They listened, clasping one another, and then it came again—one, two, three. . . .

*Sunday, 10th September*

Sleeping is a peace-time prejudice. I spent the night in hearing the stunning din of heavy vehicles on the road, as the rows of lorries and armoured cars passed through the village. Captain Trojanowski slept in my room. It was his first real rest since war began, and he was more than glad to be able to take off his boots and stretch out on a proper bed. When he is asleep he looks like a cherub. All the same he was wakened several times during the night by soldiers coming to report or ask for orders.

Early in the morning mother brought both of us tea and ham sandwiches. How sweet of her! How nice in these difficult days to have someone who cares and who thinks of you.

"The general arrived last night and is now having a sleep," said mother, and disappeared behind the door.

The brigade had been ordered to move up. The enemy had been halted. His northern army and that attempting to cross the Vistula south of Warsaw had been checked, but there was much mopping up to be done and the danger from his mechanized divisions was always very real. Hence General Anders was being sent up to harass his advanced positions.

Everything seemed very quiet when they had gone. Again we had nothing but our small local problems to interest us and Viasno was once more just a tiny village. To-day, for the first time, I saw our heavy artillery on the move. They had already been molested by German aircraft somewhere nearer Warsaw; now they bivouacked under the cover of trees and bushes on both sides of

the road. The guns were most carefully maintained and cleaned, and the dark horses which were all of the same breed looked in good condition and well groomed.

At home, in spite of its being Sunday, mother ordered something like a large-scale spring cleaning. So much dirt had collected during those few hectic days that it was "simply impossible to go on like that any longer." There had not even been enough time to wash the plates and cutlery properly. Now with the brigade away, servants, mother and Zula tried to put things in order. It looked as though it would be the first normal day since we had arrived here.

We went to church to the high mass, but were too late for the sermon. There were many there who did not belong to our village. One and all prayed ardently and when the priest recited the words of the Litany . . . "Good Lord deliver us from plague, pestilence and famine; from fire and battle . . ." there was religious exaltation in the voices as they repeated his words. Kneeling, with their eyes raised towards Heaven, the whole congregation ardently prayed for victory and peace. There was no difference among them, they were at that moment one.

After the noisy meals, with so many people at the table, lunch to-day seemed very quiet and quick. Apart from ourselves there were only three officers present and one man from the evacuated factory staff, which was still quartered in various parts of the village. After lunch we read the newspapers which we had not seen for the last few days. Someone had brought a whole bundle of them and it was possible to read the back numbers. We were particularly avid of foreign news, being always hopeful of some cheering item from the Western Front. The seven breaches in the Siegfried Line focused our attention. The few small sheets, which were our newspapers, contained chiefly appeals and extracts from speeches which interested nobody. The Socialist paper, *Robotnik* (*The Worker*) managed to produce more news on one sheet than most of the others: the Rockefeller Institute of Hygiene had been hit and its roof partly torn off; its sandbags had proved effective to protect the frontage; a German shell had hit Belvedere House, which had been the home of Marshal Pilsudski, and

destroyed part of that national sanctuary; several houses in the boulevard of Aleje Ujazdowskie, including the building of the inspector general of the army, had also been damaged by the German fire. There were plenty of good covered trenches in Marszałkowska Street, but few people made use of them during the air raids. Apart from that sort of information there was very little news.

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Every department of our Civic Guard was now working properly; sentries had been put at the most important points and at the bakeries; the clinic was functioning very satisfactorily with the little rudimentary material it had at its disposal; we had organized the delivery of corn to the mill and given instructions for the flour to be bolted only once, so that we could have the usual brown bread; and we now had a staff of messenger boys.

This afternoon's meeting in the village hall started fairly punctually, about three o'clock, with a very satisfactory attendance. Among the items on our agenda was the question of the dead horses, of which there were dozens scattered all over Viasno, especially near the roads where they were killed by the enemy planes, or just left as they collapsed from sheer exhaustion. Then there was the question of repainting the barriers of the bridge. They were white and, we felt sure, extremely visible from the air and of great assistance to the German pilots. As there was no paint to be obtained in the whole of Viasno and we did not think it wise to delay, someone suggested using a bucketful of mud. At that moment we heard the roar of aeroplanes.

They appeared suddenly and at first rather high, but soon swerved and began to lose height. I looked at the faces of the people in the room. Mr. Pazurski appeared no longer interested in the proceedings; his eyes were wandering round somewhere; Mr. Wielgos looked nervously at Mr. Grynberg; while Mr. Mucha was writing the same word twice. There was nothing for me to do but instantly adjourn the meeting.

"Have we any shelters near the council house?" asked Mr. Kolba, who represented the adjacent village of Graby Wielkie.

"Yes, we have a trench quite near, but it is not very safe," replied Mr. Mucha.

There was no time to waste. A minute later we heard the aeroplanes returning. There must have been a large number. Mr. Pazurski who, in the meantime had jumped through the window, said:

"There are eighteen of them," and ran to the trench.

The rest of us moved quickly to the back room where, according to Mr. Mucha, the walls were thickest. Somebody flung the garden door open. The roar of the aeroplanes increased and suddenly the whole building jumped and shook to its foundations. I saw the wooden props of the council house move and we heard a violent crash as if part of the house had fallen. At the same time came the clatter of glass as the window panes in the room we had just left broke in pieces. We looked at one another as though surprised that we were still alive and the room still there.

We stood close together. Those terrible minutes of expectation passed slowly, very slowly. The planes came over in relays of three. As they approached, our anxiety grew, to ebb only as the roar of the engines dwindled and was lost in the distance. They did not all go, however. Some circled round and came back. Again we heard a loud detonation, but it was not comparable with the first one.

As the village was practically undefended and there was no danger from splinters, there was no harm in going out to see how the land lay. The soldiers had scattered and were hiding under the trees trying to keep their horses from moving. There were several planes overhead, but considerably higher now. From the ground they looked like little white spots. From time to time they would break formation, bank and swoop, and then form up again.

Presently they were over our park. There was something ominous about them and I thought: "Good God! will they drop bombs on our house; their spies have probably told them about its being the headquarters of the brigade? I brought mother and Zula here, but this place is perhaps less safe than Warsaw." They kept circling round and round the park, then one of them

flew over the house and at that moment we heard a terrible, prolonged explosion.

From where I was standing I could not see either the roof or the chimneys and did not know whether the house had been blown up or was merely hidden behind the trees. I started to run through the fields towards the park. Then the aeroplanes came back and I dropped down in a furrow among the cabbages and sunflowers, under whose large dials I took cover. They were definitely machine-gunning the roads and the bushes. They must have had information that troops were hiding in the thickets. The roads presented a good target because of the enormous traffic, and they were always certain to find victims there. They dropped a few more bombs on the distant village and you could now see their effect. There was a cloud of smoke blotting out the distance. With that smoke went somebody's property. I felt that I wanted to help those people to save their homes, but the fire was too far away. Besides I did not yet know what had happened to our house. The bomb must have fallen very close. I started to run again.

I had reached a little wood by a pond when I heard the aeroplanes coming up again behind me. There were several people in the wood, some of them workers from the evacuated factory, and also groups of soldiers sheltering with their horses. Everybody crouched down as best he could—close into the tree-trunks was the best place. Suddenly, through the hum of the engines we heard a noise as if someone was dropping cobble-stones on the crowns of the trees, and small twigs and branches began falling on the moss.

"The Boches are machine-gunning," shouted a voice. "Stick to the ground everybody!" One machine after another came hedge-hopping overhead with a terrific growling of engines and machine-guns which merged into one angry sound. The branches and leaves clipped off by the bullets continued to fall in cascades, and every now and again a bullet would hit a stone and send out a shower of sparks as from a knife being ground on the wheel.

"Is anybody hurt?" cried several voices. We searched the wood for a moment: fortunately no one was injured, though the

Germans were flying at an altitude of a few hundred feet only. They had gone.

I ran towards our house anxious to know whether my people were safe. Mother and Zula were still in the trench with several soldiers, and just by it stood a motor car. There were several bullet holes in the bodywork. How fortunate that mother and Zula had stayed in the shelter!

Presently we went up to the house. The walls were still intact but about half the window panes were broken. In the hall we walked on glass; glass was strewn everywhere and it cracked unpleasantly under our feet. Bits of glass of various sizes were rattling in the windows, some of them just flimsily hanging out of the window frames. It was a very desolate sight. One of the maids was already sweeping the bits from the kitchen staircase.

I was just going out to look for the crater when a wounded soldier was brought in on a stretcher. As he was carried across the hall the glass crunched loudly under the men's feet. The brigade doctor not being there, we sent for the ambulance man of our Civic Guard, and in the meantime laid the wounded soldier on a bed in one of the rooms. He had fainted from pain. When he recovered another soldier began pulling the boot off his wounded foot. This was a most painful thing and against all the principles of first aid. I knew enough about it to stop him and cut the boot open with a sharp knife. The wounded man looked at me with gratitude and relief. He whispered: "I have been wounded several times in my life. I have fought in many wars, but now I feel this is the end of me." And then he relapsed into a state of semi-consciousness.

"Brr, Brr! I feel so cold, I am freezing. How dreadfully cold it is in this room," upon which he began to shake as in ague. We covered him with a rug. He asked for something to drink. There was a glass on the table, and I handed it to him. At the last moment it occurred to me that perhaps it might not be water and I snatched it from his hand. I smelt the fluid: it was not water but some strange eye lotion which one of the officers had left in the glass. That taught me a lesson. I shall remember for ever that one must make doubly sure what one is giving to

a patient. I felt very guilty, although no harm had been done. The soldier, who had already moistened his lips in the liquid, looked at me with grieved eyes and complained that the drink was bitter. I changed the glass and gave him some water. The poor devil did not realize that I had made a mistake and if he is alive to-day he will probably only remember the glass of water and will imagine that the lotion did him some good.

The ambulance man discovered several splinters in his body, that his foot was very badly damaged and an immediate operation necessary. He dressed the wounds which, strangely enough, did not bleed very much, and we covered him with several blankets. The rest would have to wait for a doctor; but now that the brigade had left Viasno should we be able to find one qualified to perform the operation? We tried. Several guardsmen were placed on the main highway and other roads to stop any ambulance which might pass, and after a whole hour of agonizing expectation in the dust of the moving supply columns we saw a passenger car and an officer in it, whom to my joy I saw to be an army doctor and a distant relative of mine. We stopped the car and told him all about our poor wounded soldier.

The doctor was in a great hurry, as he was moving a hospital, but he stepped up to the house and had the man taken to his car and so to the hospital. A most fortunate occurrence! How many soldiers have to die simply because they cannot be got to hospital in time?

The bombs had made two large holes among the trees about 250 yards from the house. We searched them, but there was nothing to be found except a tangle of torn roots. A few of the young trees nearby had been completely uprooted. They had no chance of surviving. What were the Germans aiming at? Was their marksmanship so bad that they missed our house, or were they bombing the bushes which only the day before had harboured soldiers and guns?

Besides the two which fell near the house the Germans dropped a number of bombs on the village, starting several fires. On the whole, however, the damage was not as considerable as one might have expected from such an intensive raid. The largest



bomb that fell was the one which shook the village hall during our meeting. It was an enormous one and left a very deep crater in the field, killed several horses on the road, and wounded two women, who were taken to our Viasno ambulance. Near its bowl-shaped crater (some people thought it was one of their half-ton bombs) fell an incendiary bomb which left a round mark like a plate all covered with grey ashes. The heat of the thermite had burned half of an old cherry tree.

I was still inspecting the crater and the damage done by the raid when the news reached me that the police had abandoned the police station, which had been shattered in the bombardment, and departed in an unknown direction. For the second time Viasno was without its police and the whole responsibility now rested with our Civic Guard. Sentries had to be strengthened and we had to post others where the police had had theirs. The most important place to guard was the enclosure belonging to the short wave wireless station which was hidden in the woods on the hills. In its grounds the Government had built a small subsidiary petrol dump. The petrol was stored in metal drums in a shelter, the key to which was kept by the manager, a member of the Postmen's Military Organization.

It was a great relief when, in the evening, the cavalry brigade returned to Viasno.

*Monday, 11th September*

The general came to breakfast in bright blue and white pyjamas, to the great delight of the officers and ladies. A general appearing at the breakfast table in the middle of war in elegant pyjamas is a heartening sight. It is a gesture both of disdain for the enemy and of self-confidence; a sort of protest against this upset to the routine of life. If it had not been for the respect due to such a high personage, we should have cheered him as he appeared on the doorstep with Major Soltan. He was himself in excellent humour; he had had a nice shave, his little moustache was well trimmed, and his small but very bright eyes were like buttons set in his rather dry but shapely face. The general and his chief of staff formed a perfect contrast. The former was very vivacious,

spoke a lot and kept that pleasant confident smile, which was always so reassuring to his subordinates, while Major Soltan was very reserved and austere, though he, too, was brighter than the other day.

I knew the cause of this visible improvement in the general spirits. Major Lizun, a typical old soldier, told me that the German advance had been halted west of Warsaw, and that in some parts the Germans had even started retreating. The Polish Army Corps of General Kutrzeba, which defended Poznan, had fought its way through the Germans and was barring their way somewhere near Lowicz, Kutno. Better news had also come from the southern front, where the attacks launched from Slovakia and Silesia had been halted near Lwow. Here Sosnkowski, one of our best generals, was organizing the defence.

General Anders and his brigade had also scored a personal success. They had taken sixty prisoners, whom they brought to Viasno, and destroyed a considerable number of enemy supply units. Their excursion had found the enemy entirely unprepared, as they had moved by night and charged at dawn.

I had a long conversation with Major Soltan. As the brigade constituted the military authority at Viasno I asked him whether the Civic Guard could issue arms licences to its members. His answer was in the affirmative and he stressed that it was our duty to keep order by every available means. He also gave us a safe conduct for our cart and horses which took the corn to the mill. Otherwise they could always be stopped by any army unit and commandeered.

The Civic Guard has been doing good work and the people have already learned to rely on its help. The information service especially has been very useful to stranded soldiers and civilians. To-day we have had quite a wave of people returning to Warsaw from their trek. Not being able to reach the towns where recruiting was supposed to be going on, and having had a taste of discomfort and hunger, many of the young folk were trudging back along the road they had come. Many came to the office of the Civic Guard in the course of the day and asked where they could find shelter and food, others were returning home to

Warsaw where they still had provisions. Our sentries also proved very useful to the endless lines of supply columns winding along the roads.

To-day we were not so fortunate in catching the German spies, though we had opportunities. The general had with him his own servant whom he had put in uniform and who helped our maids at table. He at once assumed the status of grand master of our kitchen. After lunch he was conversing with one of the maids in the kitchen when Stanislaus came in to have his soup and a cigarette. I happened to be there at the time and, seeing the old gardener, I started a conversation.

"Are there still as many people congregating round the well?"

Stanislaus smiled good naturedly: "At present the crowd is not so big; but if the convoys keep on moving back to Warsaw we shall probably soon have another congestion."

"What do you mean: aren't the convoys moving away from Warsaw?" said I, surprised.

"Well, we are probably doing very well now, if the army is not retreating any more. I guess that this must be the reason why the convoys are now hurrying back to Warsaw," Stanislaus continued unperturbed, and went on rolling his cigarette.

I did not know what to think of the news and went upstairs to ask the officers what it all meant. But not wanting to make a fool of myself by asking a silly question I waited till I saw my room-mate, Captain Trojanowski, and put it this way: "Is it all right for a supply column to change its direction?"

"It is never all right when soldiers change their destination, but why do you ask?" replied the captain.

"You see, our gardener, Stanislaus, has just said that the convoys are now moving fast towards Warsaw," was my answer.

"What!" exclaimed the captain. "Come with me, this wants looking into."

We nearly ran. Already in the distance we could hear that something unusual was going on on the road. Men were swearing noisily, whips were cracking and from time to time there were loud crashes. When we arrived on the main road we saw a pandemonium. In utter confusion and in clouds of dust the

various convoys were attempting to turn round and move back. The whole road was completely blocked. The frightened horses were falling with their shafts on the other vehicles; the drivers were lashing each other in the face and whipping their horses nervously. Some of the wagons had capsized and the horses were struggling in their harness. The men were in a state of panic.

The same thing was happening for as far as we could see along the road. The whole long column was trying to turn and all at the same time. You can imagine what a sight that was. I was sure that in a few minutes they would start shooting at each other. In their fright the drivers were ready to do anything to secure a little precious room for their own wagon and horses.

Captain Trojanowski rushed forward like a juggernaut into the middle of all that congestion. He roared at them to stop the rioting at once. His presence cooled the men a little, but they could not all see him and those in front and those at the back were still in a state of complete tumult.

"Order! Quiet! Stop, stop!" yelled the captain.

"What has happened? Who gave you the order to turn back?"

The drivers looked at us as if we were half-wits; as if we were asking why the sun was shining at mid-day. But they explained that a few minutes ago a Polish major had passed in a great hurry in a Buick car and, as he had met German tanks at the outskirts of the forest, which was visible on the horizon, had ordered the column to retreat. He gave the order. He was wearing the uniform of a staff major and was very definite about the German tanks, of which he said there was a strong contingent. Having warned the convoy he disappeared in a southerly direction at top speed.

I felt quite convinced that in a few minutes now we should see German tanks, and I greatly admired Captain Trojanowski's calmness. I was eager to hear what orders he would give in preparation for the German attack, but to my surprise he took no special steps at all.

I was helping him as best I could and ran to fetch some more officers, because poor Trojanowski obviously could not cope with the whole column, which was at least two miles long. Some came

in cars and others on motor bicycles, but instead of trying to deal with the supply wagons they drove off ahead as if they were in pursuit of somebody. The soldiers, seeing the officers dashing away at such speed, thought it was a case of *saute qui peut* and again became panicky, but fortunately some more officers appeared swinging along in a leisurely manner and soon calmed the whole turmoil. One by one the wagons were turned back and again started off on their previous course.

In the meantime the officers who had dashed off in their cars came back terribly annoyed and looking like a pack of hounds which had lost the scent. I heard only detached words and angry comments.

"His car was too quick. . . . Perhaps he took some side turning. We had better telephone to warn all the units in the neighbourhood. . . ."

"He spoke Polish without a trace of German accent."

"Surely one of the German minority. They got a magnificent training."

"His bearing and appearance were quite like ours."

"It is not the first column he has upset like that."

I knew now. He was one of those dare-devils, German agents who went about disguised as Polish officers and used all sorts of tricks to upset the movements of our troops. It was a well-knit part of the German guerilla warfare and took the form of disturbing all means of communication and misleading our soldiers. The stratagem required great skill and cunning, but it was in fact quite safe, because the saboteur could nearly always easily escape in the turmoil which he himself created. Very often he co-operated with other spies who notified the German airmen by means of rockets. It is much easier and safer to bomb or machine-gun a column when it has fallen into general disorder.

When the soldiers on the supply column saw that they had been duped by the Germans they felt very sheepish and cursed the "major" in the most abusive terms.

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The executive body of the Viasno Civic Guard met this after-

noon in the park under the trees. The meeting looked like a picnic, and could more rightly be termed a "lying" than a sitting. Crouching close to the ground for fear of bombs and bullets, we deliberated on public affairs. The meeting was well attended and everybody laughed because conditions forced us to hold forth in the ditch to the accompaniment of the croaking of frogs and buzzing of mosquitoes. Despite the circumstances all current business was disposed of and Mr. Sakowski received his extra diggers to help to bury all the carcasses of the horses killed during yesterday's bombardment.

At half-past three German aircraft visited Viasno again. They did not drop bombs, but circled round the district concentrating chiefly on the roads which they systematically machine-gunned from very low altitudes. No guns were there to answer their impudence. They flew to-day in a formation of threes, one trio after another, and the last three turned round the village and broke formation. We knew that nothing good was to be anticipated from that. Indeed they hovered first, then dived down on to the road and began peppering it with bullets. Two or three minutes later we saw them rejoin the others and fade away. The damage was already done.

News came from the village that two men had been killed and a child wounded through the arm. They had all been trying to escape in a fallow field. When I saw the boy, who was aged about seven, the blood was still oozing slowly through his sleeve and falling in large red drops on the furrow. He was crying terribly at a level plaintive pitch, a cry of mingled horror and complaint. He was soon brought to the ambulance where one of the nurses dressed the wound. The bone was badly affected and it would be necessary to take him to hospital. The two men were left on the road. Mr. Mucha will try to identify them to-morrow. They deserve at least that their families should be able one day to find out where they lost their lives. But how many such conscientious Mr. Muchas can you find in Poland? How many would take all that trouble to enter the names of the dead in their village books? Hundreds and thousands of people have found death on the roads of Poland and no one will ever

be able to trace their end. Perhaps that is better for those who survive and will live in the hope that one day they will see their husbands or children again. Shall I myself see Felix again?

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Mother said she was going to drive by car to Warsaw. At first I thought it mad to take such a risk, but she insisted and went. She promised that she would come back before dinner, and took with her a young enterprising lieutenant, a surgeon attached to the brigade ambulance. He had to go to Warsaw on brigade business and promised to look after mother. Apart from the danger of air raids there was the driving on congested roads full of obstacles, but Doctor Kiemnowicz looked as though he could be trusted. In Warsaw mother bought several things in the shops which were now kept open. She found father in good health but with nerves frayed by the bombardment. He told her of the terrific fire which a German bomb had started in the large hospital of the Transfiguration of Our Lord where patients and nurses perished alike. Everybody was talking about the German tank which had hurled itself as far as Wola, the western suburb of Warsaw, where it was set ablaze by women throwing ignited petrol bottles at it. The German crew were burned alive inside. Cafés and most restaurants were now working more or less normally. Trenches were being dug everywhere, and even father, notwithstanding his age, was helping to dig one across our street.

When she came back, mother brought our wireless and so we were able to listen-in in the evening. We were reported to be holding firm at Lwow. The Germans had to-day bombed Lwow, Lublin, Przemyśl and Sandomierz. Brest Litovsk had been taken as the residence of the Polish Government. We turned for a minute to a German station, but their monotonous boasting of successes was too annoying.

*Tuesday, 12th September*

Anybody who steals another person's torch or battery should get at least ten years' solitary confinement. My torch, with a half-used battery, has disappeared and it is quite impossible to

buy another. Just vanished from my table. No one would be interested in my diary, but the torch was really precious. It is infuriating. I must dress very quickly and cannot find my trousers in the dark. The bread will soon be ready, and the crowd won't wait. Even with the help of the guard the bakers will not be able to keep them in check. Must we always have trouble with our bakeries? I know now what bread means to hungry soldiers, but all the same, we don't want any bloodshed. The soldiers have been waiting all night and will not go away empty-handed. On the other hand we cannot supply it to regular troops; Viasno is not a large factory, nor can we do the impossible. Here at last are my trousers!

It was still dark when I reached the bakery. Inside it was like Vulcan's forge. Grouped round the one small lamp, glittering redly on the oven, were the old baker, his beard as white with flour as the rest of his clothes, and his assistant. Encircling them like expectant vultures were soldiers and officers, dim figures which moved about but who never took their eyes from their prey. They already looked fierce and threatening. From the moment he put the dough inside his hot oven the baker's life was in danger, and well he knew it. The civilians were no bother, it was the marauders, and worst of all, the officers and N.C.O.s who came with their detachments and empty bags for the bread they were determined to have. No news travels faster than that of bread being baked among hungry people. It brings them crowding like moths to a light in the darkness. The weaker and unarmed civilians, especially the inhabitants of Viasno, waited quietly or quarrelled among themselves for places in the queue, but they did not dare to enter the bakery. That was the privilege of the strong. Even the two gendarmes who stood at the entrance were powerless when officers made their way in and ordered loaves in dozens. The baker accepted any order, for a hundred, for a thousand, for ten thousand, it was all the same to him. He did not count. As long as the bread was not ready, he knew that he was covered by the law of nature. The precious dough was fastened in, untouchable. He also knew that he was, anyway, too weak to do anything when the time came, so he accepted



order after order for quantities many scores of times in excess of his capacity.

When I arrived some soldiers were already peeping into the oven and I could hear voices saying that the bread was ready. But neither baker nor guard would agree, for it was to their interest to delay things. As long as the loaves remained in the oven there was peace. Every moment more of baking meant one moment more of peace, but when they started taking them out . . .

Shouting was no good; I tried that. It had a momentary effect, and then all was confusion again. But there is one great force, the only one except naked brutality, which can to some extent compete with hunger, and that is humour. When people laugh they can be made to follow. After heaven knows how many vain attempts to range civilians and soldiers into two separate queues, I finally shouted as loudly as I could that, if they were to squash the Commander-in-Chief of the Viasno Civic Guard to death when he was trying to get them bread, there would probably be none for anyone. Most, but not all, became more amenable. One of the marauders pointed his rifle at me and threatened to stab me with his bayonet. I looked him straight in the face, straight into his tragic animal eyes, and could feel nothing but the profoundest sympathy for him.

By playing off one queue against the other and giving fair promises to the officers, we managed to keep some order and clear everybody out of the bakery. Mr. Pazurski and the baker's assistant cut each loaf into four and we sold a quarter to everyone in the two queues, one of which was composed of all the soldiers and the policemen from other towns and counties, and the other of the civilians. To maintain a semblance of justice, we sold a few loaves to one queue and then started on the other, to the accompaniment of growls and grumbling remarks about too much bread being sold to the civilians and *vice versa*.

It was now growing light and I could see the terrific length of these two human rows. The seemingly endless demand made us acutely conscious of how limited was our little supply. We could work no miracles. We charged one penny for each quarter

loaf, and those soldiers who could not pay got it free. There were, of course, many who, having bought their ration, went to the end of the queue and tried to repeat the purchase. But one soon develops a good eye, and what with the protests of the crowd, there were few who got away with it. People remonstrated loudly whenever they saw soldiers walking away with loaded sacks or carrying several loaves, which they had been allowed for their units, but we had to make this allowance if we wished to avoid organized attack from our own troops.

\*

"Mister, you have sold us bread, now we should like to buy some women," said one of a group of soldiers, having now satisfied first the hunger of his stomach.

"I haven't seen a woman," said another, "since the war began."

Truly this war was different from other wars. There was no glamour, no romance or roystering. The retreat was too swift, never stopping for long, but always passing, passing. And the continual menace from the air did not encourage the civilian population to stand about and talk.

It was so difficult to distinguish between deserters and genuine soldiers that we tried to keep them all on the move and send them on to the next village. But there were now so many in the village and its neighbourhood that there was a real danger of their getting out of hand, and it was a great relief when Captain Lasota from the brigade unexpectedly appeared. He lined them up and lectured them soundly, even savagely, then told them to disperse at once. This had an excellent effect and rid us of many undesirables.

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On the hilltop to-day stood a horse, motionless and with hanging head. It was badly wounded through the jaw, in which there was a terrible red hole with an icicle of clotted blood and dirt tapering from the side. With such a wound the animal could not eat and was doomed to starve to death, unless it died first of its horrible wound. In the bread queue I found Mr. Cohen, who was very knowledgeable about horses, as he used once to

be a horse dealer, and I asked him whether the animal could be saved. He examined it. Its eyes were already metallic and expressionless. Only a very careful and prolonged treatment could perhaps save it, but where to get all the medicaments and so much bandage. The two ambulances under the trees in the distance had not even enough for the soldiers, so we decided to shoot the poor animal and put it out of its pain. The crater made by the big bomb would come in useful after all. There was one carcass already in it, and across the field was Mr. Sakowski with a pair of draught horses dragging along another. Its belly was enormously swollen and it trundled behind the straining horses, levelling the furrows like a steam roller. Horses die standing and decompose extraordinarily quickly.

Farther away a small boy was clearing up branches which had been cut off by the bombs. As I watched him somebody tapped me on the shoulder. I turned round and saw Tomek Toporovski, my old friend at the University, where he used to say he was studying racing and the gentle art of betting. He was a little man and we always called him "Tom Tit." Tomek was a count, and bore one of the best names in Poland. He was with two other brother officers and all that remained of their squadron—eight lancers. Their regiment had been decimated by the German tanks before they forced the river Narew. Tomek and his men were now moving more or less aimlessly and stopping longer than necessary in order to get some rest.

Tomek's account of the war was not very inspiring. Eight lancers left out of a whole squadron! That was the result of sending cavalry to attack tanks. Magnificent bravery—but mad and pointless. Our lancers were marvellous, but had we the right to send them to slaughter? Where on earth were our anti-tank guns?

. . . Suddenly there was a whizz and a red rocket soared.

Tomek shuddered.

"Enemy signallers! Showing that our artillery is in the wood. They will not escape us this time!"

He called five of his lancers, some more people joined us and

we all ran in the direction from which the signals had come. The place was surrounded and we searched, beating the undergrowth. He must have been hiding somewhere, and we were determined to get him dead or alive. But already the German aeroplanes were on their way. We could hear the hum of their engines, and suddenly a thought occurred to me. All those enormous queues outside the bakeries. What an ideal target, especially if they start moving about. I turned and ran like mad. That the end of all our efforts during these last few days should be that the enemy pilots turned their guns on them! And the soldiers are just as bad as the civilians, if not worse, because they think they know better, start moving, and so give themselves away.

Fortunately some officers were already there and had taken charge. Those near a wall were told to stand motionless, while those farther down the queue were made to sit on the ground and keep still. Orders are easily given, but not so easily carried out, and it took much pushing, swearing and shouting before some sort of order was established. In the meantime the raiders had come and gone after dropping one or two bombs on the wood.

In the distance I saw Tomek nervously approaching with a suit case in his hand, and behind him a group of lancers with fixed bayonets conducting a civilian.

"We've got him," cried Tomek, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief, his face all hot with excitement.

"Take a look at that!" and he showed me the brown case. At the first glance it looked no different from any small travelling case, but Tomek opened it and showed me the false bottom beneath which was another compartment containing a row of rockets arranged like knives and forks in a canteen of silver. There was room for about ten, of which a few were already missing. Each rocket bore an inscription in German, the instructions, and a bold *VORSICHTIG*, "Handle with Care." Some had a circle in the middle of the barrel which, as I later learned, indicated the height at which the rocket exploded.

There were some cries of "Shoot him!" from the angry soldiers, who knew how much they had already suffered from those

saboteurs. But Tomek did not dream of doing anything of the kind. On the contrary, he ordered his lancers to guard the spy carefully. The catch was too precious to be shot out of hand, for he probably carried documents and the brigade commander might be able to get valuable information out of him. A minute later they were all on the way to the manor house. The spy, knowing full well that his fate was already sealed, marched erect in the midst of the lancers. He would do no more for his Reich, but there were hundreds and thousands of other spies still at large and co-operating with the army of the invader.

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The afternoon orders had already been issued and there were only a few officers in the hall. The general was free, but he did not look too happy, and mother asked him whether he would care for a game of bridge, which she knew he liked. A four was made up in no time. The general was a ladies' man and a great conversationalist. He always had something interesting to say and also the gift of closing one eye to the unpleasant side of life. But to-day even he could not conceal the fact that there was something on his mind. In order to avoid questions he decided to take the offensive and asked mother whether the attacks from the air worried her and whether she disliked the bombs or the machine-gunning more. Mother admitted that the violent bombardment, during which she had had to stay in our trench, was extremely unpleasant. Upon that, the general called one of his officers and said:

"Will you please order two small anti-aircraft guns to be sent to Viasno from Graby Wielkie and have them placed in the wood. We cannot allow these 'gentlemen' to fly with impunity over Viasno."

Mother felt grand. To have anti-aircraft guns specially for the defence of Viasno gave to all of us a queer sort of satisfaction. So far anti-aircraft defence had been for us something entirely abstract and impersonal, something determined by higher powers in which we had no concern. But now we realized that anti-aircraft guns were subject to human control and could even be

used for our direct defence. We felt that now nothing was impossible, but we also realized that in order that Viasno should be protected, Graby Wielkie would have to do without two guns, and we knew that the number available was very limited. Our Polish guns are excellent (the best proof of that was that Britain and Holland bought them), but had we enough for our own defence? However, the general knew what he was doing and, perhaps, it was a good thing to move the guns about, so that the raiders would not know where they would be met with shells. They really thought themselves too safe in Poland and behaved as though they were already in their own country. Whatever the reason for the general's decision, we were thrilled that from to-morrow morning we should be so well defended.

After this little interruption the game was resumed and soon the bidding was as brisk as though tricks were the only thing that mattered in the world. The general was called several times to the telephone and Zula played for him while he was away. The calls were from General Zulauf's brigade, which was defending the right bank of the Vistula and kept in constant touch with General Anders. Although it was only the twelfth day of the war, communications were already broken between a number of army corps, and it was lucky that these two were able to remain in contact.

The general returned from one such conversation in much better spirits. He resumed the game, then all of a sudden started explaining to the ladies some of the more important moves which were taking place, while we all hung on his words.

Warsaw was busy preparing her defences and the enemy would meet with a very stout resistance there. To-day, near Kutno, we had destroyed a whole division and taken a large number of prisoners, but the battle was not yet finished, so it was difficult to say what the effect of this success would be. The Germans were using a number of aeroplanes in a concentrated attack on our infantry, which had so far withstood the pressure extremely well. They had also tried to cross the Vistula south of Plock, but so far without success, and north of Warsaw they were everywhere held on the left bank of the river. The northern army

under the command of General Bortnowski (the same who occupied Teschen last year after Munich) was fighting its way back towards the fortress of Modlin, which was held by a very strong garrison. There was nothing alarming in the general's account; on the contrary, everything sounded hopeful and encouraging. But did he tell us all? I dared not ask.

Zula, however, could not resist saying: "When will the British send us their bombers? How much longer do they want us to wait? Aren't we their allies?"

"I do not know," replied the general, "but I suppose it is only a question of hours."

"Then why don't the Allies bomb Berlin? Is there any sense in dropping leaflets? Here the Germans are decimating our people from the air and the British play about with bits of paper. How the Germans must laugh!"

"I do not know," was the answer, and this time, I was sure, the true one. Like everybody else in Poland he hoped that help would come, but when . . .? Would it come in time? Would they be sent through Roumania, or would they fly over Germany? If our aeroplanes could have flown successfully and dropped bombs on Berlin, why then could not the French and the British machines come here?

The general spoke about the successful French attack on Saarbrücken, which was expected to fall any time now. One did feel, however, that he was not able to keep in touch with the chief command, though of course he never said so. One felt all the more admiration for him for his intuitive judgment, his presence of mind, and his assumption of the whole responsibility.

The young officers began asking him questions. The relations between a good general and his staff officers are very similar to those between a professor and his students. The professor gives his students the benefit of his superior knowledge and wider experience, and answers their questions whenever he can. So it was with General Anders, whom his officers trusted completely. Having a right to dispose of their lives, he felt himself under an obligation to take them into his confidence as much as possible.

That is what made him such an excellent leader and why all his subordinates trusted him so implicitly.

"Is it true that French pilots have already been seen in Warsaw?" asked one.

Supper was announced before the general could reply and he took his seat at the head of the table with mother next to him. As the various officers came in the general smiled at them, like a good father greeting his sons. He liked them all and knew them well; knew how far he could rely on and how much expect from each.

"In view of this rather good news," said mother, "perhaps we could all have some vodka. This seems to be quite a fitting occasion." The suggestion was cheered and we drank the toast "To Our Army." After dinner the general retired with Major Soltan to the staff room, one of the few left with windows, and the officers who were not immediately wanted crowded round the wireless in the darkening hall. The Warsaw station broadcast news, patriotic songs and national music, in accordance with the energetic mayor's attempt to restore life to normal. The German stations poured out a flood of the most obvious lies, which misled their own commanders more than the Poles. One detachment, thinking that Warsaw had surrendered, marched up to our barricades at Powazki, where to their great surprise they were taken prisoner.

In the village hall after supper I found a few peasants discussing with Mr. Mucha the plague of masterless dogs which were now wandering about Viasno. They were the aftermath of the wave of refugees and presented something of a problem. There was one beautiful black and grey spaniel roaming about near our house. He was a most exquisite dog, very much like our own Romeo, whom we had left in Warsaw. Now he has stopped howling so dreadfully since mother told the cook to give him something to eat with our dogs. But the others were a real nuisance, slinking about in the bushes with their tails between their legs. One of them has already bitten old Mrs. Gold in the leg when she came to the house with some things for us.

I had brought a whole bundle of newspapers with me and had



to read out the most important bits to my eager audience. As I read, some of the old men sighed. Why should Poland be chosen by Providence to suffer such severe punishment? The Polish peasant is certainly not a person who allows himself to be swayed by easy emotions; only hard facts impress him; but when we came to the reports of the glorious advance of the French along the Siegfried Line, all eyes glittered and the pensive faces livened.

Outside in the darkness someone knocked at the door. It was a tramp inquiring the way to Warsaw for, he said, there was no point in going farther east, as the German tanks were already there. Besides, it should be easier to get food in Warsaw, where supplies were larger than in the villages along the main roads. Mr. Mucha put him on his way, but could give him no bread. He had none himself to-night. If what the tramp said was true, it meant that the ring round Warsaw was closing in from the east as well. Without adequate anti-tank defence the Germans could wreak their havoc far behind the lines and might soon overrun the whole country.

We went outside and continued our conversation in the darkness of the September night. The moon had set and the Great Bear and Orion's Belt were gloriously visible in the sky. But what was that? From time to time a path of light cut an arc out of the heavens far away to the east, to be followed by another from the opposite direction. There was no sound to be heard. It might have been lightning, except that its course was much more continuous. It was the opposing artillery trying to find their range with tracer shells. The enemy could not be so very far away.

*Wednesday, 13th September*

The clock in the hall had just struck two. The whole house was sound asleep with only the sentries on duty, when the report of a rifle was heard near the house. It was echoed by another. A minute later more shots broke the stillness of the night. The shooting grew. More rifles joined in. It came from all over the park and from the village. In no time it had spread and the sound came from every side, so that it was impossible to grasp who was shooting at whom.

Captain Trojanowski and I leaped from our beds. In a few moments we were dressed and hurried to the hall to see what was going on. As we came in, all the other doors opened one by one and in each appeared an officer with a candle. Had it not been for an occasional curse, we might have thought we had come upon a gathering of shrouded ghosts.

The shooting did not cease, but kept coming from a different side. Were the Germans already at Viasno? Obviously they were not far. Some officers went out, groping their way in the darkness, and scattered across to where the different detachments were quartered. Captain Trojanowski moved off in the direction of the village, and I went with him to help him find his way and dodge the big trees, all of which I knew well.

"What do you think it is?" I asked.

"It is difficult to say. As there had been no machine-gun fire it shows that the shooting was probably unorganized. I doubt whether it could be an enemy tank. But why guess; in a moment we shall know."

"Halt and give the password!"

"Honour," answered the captain, and a dim figure turned and led us to an old trench, where a few soldiers were loading their rifles, staring in front of them with smarting eyes.

"I am Captain Trojanowski of the second squadron: who gave you the order to fire?"

"We are shooting because we heard the enemy fire."

"But did anybody give the order to do so?" insisted the officer.

The answer was "No." They had opened fire because they heard someone shoot. In the darkness shooting becomes contagious, it spreads in no time. The soldiers felt that the enemy was not far off and at the first shot took to their rifles. After some minutes the shooting gradually died down and quiet once more enfolded the village.

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It will be another lovely, cloudless day. The houses have shed their wrappings of morning mist and the sun has dried the last silvery beads of dew. Autumn has decked the village in its richest colours. Outside a thatched cottage there is a group of tramps

sitting round a large bonfire baking potatoes and making tea. Down by the river are some people washing their linen and spreading it out on the grass to dry. Everything is bathed in light. How one could enjoy such lovely weather were it not, alas, ideal for the enemy. A clear sky for his planes and a parched, hard soil for his tanks. We all realize it and pray for rain.

I met many refugees and soldiers on my way to the village, but this time the current was set in the opposite direction. Unable to reach their recruiting stations and disappointed with the total lack of organization they were streaming back to Warsaw, guided by the rumour that a defence army was being organized in the capital and by the prospect of finding more food there. Some had already seen the German tanks, with their white crosses painted on the front (they were much heavier than our little whippet tanks), others had been harassed by machine-gun fire from the air, but one and all repeated the story that a number of the German pilots had belonged to the notorious Condor Legion, which bombed Spain. Most of the German airmen, they said, were young boys who did their dirty work under the influence of narcotics, but it always puzzled me how they could use their complicated instruments if they were drugged or drunk. We had no personal contact with the raiders, but in a village about ten miles from Viasno a German single-seater had made a forced landing and, when the peasants and people on the road approached, the pilot wounded one of them with his revolver. He fought like a wild cat in his efforts to escape, but the peasants eventually beat him to the ground with their spades and staves.

Among the refugees from the west were the policemen from the evacuated areas. Once the representatives of the State, they were now helpless and hungry. Some still thought themselves important, but neither the soldiers nor the civilian population took any notice of them. On the way to the church I met one of these policemen with his family. He was very fat and perspiring like a pig. A few days ago he was still at his post in Bydgoszcz, but now the town was in German hands and, under cover of their arms, its German population was slaughtering the Poles.

I came across a sentry on duty. He paced to and fro with

regular steps, stopping from time to time to shift his rifle to the other shoulder. He was a tall, smart man, but instead of the regulation black boots of the Polish army he was wearing brown ones with high, slightly creased, leather tops. A boot is not an easy thing to describe, but his were quite different from anybody else's and yet not altogether unfamiliar. He wore them with evident pride.

"Where did you get those boots?" I asked him.

"I got them from a German prisoner, whom we caught yesterday."

"Did you let him go barefoot just like that?"

"Oh no," said the soldier, "I gave him my own in exchange. The leather of my boots was better, but I wanted to have a souvenir."

And so the deal was made, probably to the satisfaction of both parties.

During the day we heard conflicting news as to the progress of the war. Some people were firmly convinced that a whole German division had been routed near Kutno, and nearly a thousand prisoners taken. There were, however, many pessimists who were always expecting to see the German tanks.

It was reported to the Civic Guard that at night people could be seen all over the place busy digging. We became interested in the activities of these diggers and discovered that they were burying pots and pans, crockery, even small furniture, in fact anything saleable. They were not only people afraid of being robbed by the invaders or marauders, but in some cases also illegitimate owners, who chose this way of storing their "property."

I mentioned the diggers to Zula and then she told me that when our cousin passed through Viasno the other day she had seen a spade in his hands when he and his wife went out to the greenhouse that evening. They had locked the door and their shadows could be seen digging inside. Zula was not the girl to let such a thing pass unnoticed, and she had seen them burying a casket, probably with jewellery and family silver, in the soft ground.

"Safety first," said Zula. "Digging begins at home."

The Jewish population of Viasno was growing very anxious and, whenever I passed through their settlement, plied me with questions as to what they should do if the Germans came near. These poor people were scared stiff of the invaders and the most blood-curdling rumours were circulating among them. Before noon the wife of our butcher came to the manor and implored us to take some of her belongings into our cellar, where she thought they were more likely to be respected by the Germans, if they came, than in her own house. She remembered the German occupation of Poland during the Great War, but then in 1915 the Germans had not yet acquired their present anti-semitic views. In fact, they had been especially kind to the Jews in an attempt to drive a wedge between them and the Poles. But now!

I did my best to reassure the old woman. She and her father before her had supplied our household with its meat (except, of course, pork) and always reserved the best joints for us. The relations between the manor and its butcher were those of confidence and friendship, as witness the fact that a few years ago Zula and I were invited to the orthodox wedding of his daughter. Such an invitation from these religious people is a special honour. I remember that when, a few weeks ago, we went with mother to see the ancient synagogue in Cracow, the old precentor pointed out a pair of chandeliers which some Polish aristocrat had presented to the Jews and which hung there in his honour. The foundation stone of this synagogue was laid at the time of the greatest of the kings of Poland, Kasimir the Great, whose friendly attitude to the Jews has passed into history. The lady of his heart, the famous Esther, was a beautiful Jewess from the town of Kazimier, and their great love has given rise to many charming songs and legends.

But we could hardly comfort the Jews of Viasno with history. We had to keep on telling them that the latest news was reassuring and that they must not listen to rumours, as this only helped the enemy by creating panic. We also impressed on them that, if the worst should happen, the Germans would never be allowed to stay in the country. One of them, Mr. Grynberg, was always thinking of pretexts to come to the Civic Guard offices, so that

he might hear if there were any news. His eyes were red and his face furrowed with worry. For him Mr. Mucha resorted to his stock remedy.

"You are a business man, Mr. Grynberg, aren't you? Well, you see, Poland entered into partnership with the most reliable and the most powerful countries in Europe. Don't you think that a partnership with Britain is good enough for you? Perhaps we do not understand everything, but in the long run this partner will not let us down. Don't you trust an English promissory note?"

This always silenced Mr. Grynberg, but did not appear to make him any happier.

"What is the good of that if, in the meantime, I am going to lose my life and my property?"

"You should be ashamed of yourself, Mr. Grynberg," said someone, and that was the end of the conversation.

It was easy to reassure the others, but not easy to feel reassured oneself. Our most authoritative source of information, the general, was away. Where he had gone we did not know, nor whether he and his officers would return to Viasno as they had on previous occasions when they had gone off on a night raid. The day passed quietly in routine business. Several planes passed overhead, but no bombs were dropped. Anyway, we were used to bombs by now, and had hardly any windows left for them to break. The usual procedure was for a single plane to come over very high, disappear and then return with the others in the real raid, which always culminated in a machine-gun attack. But to-day we had our two guns hidden in the wood and when they unexpectedly opened fire, the Germans turned back and tried to locate them. We all waited for some of them to be brought down, but apparently it was not so easy. In the evening the general's car appeared at the gate and drove furiously up to the house with a procession of large limousines, all spattered with mud, tearing along behind. Getting out, he turned to mother and said:

"I think we are leaving Viasno for good this time. We have a difficult task to fulfil, which will take us away elsewhere. We all wish to thank you for your hospitality."

I went to see if I could help the officers get their things ready, and Captain Trojanowski took me to the cars and showed me that belonging to the general. The whole of the back was riddled with bullet holes, the paint chipped off and the metal torn. The car had been pursued and persistently attacked by German planes, and it was a mystery how the general had escaped.

To-day was the saddest day since we came to Viasno. The officers were depressed at leaving us, and we all gathered in the hall and listened to the patriotic songs on the wireless.

Where were they going? They already had their orders, and one party after another took to their cars. The park, which sheltered so many soldiers and horses, gradually emptied; sentry after sentry left his post, and before long the whole brigade was moving away from Viasno by various roads, leaving the park deserted and the house suddenly quiet.

## CHAPTER V

### RETURN TO WARSAW

"THE general wishes to see you at once." Leaving the group of officers with whom I was talking, I turned and followed the orderly to the general's office. It was about six o'clock. The general had not much time to spare and what he had to say was clear and precise.

"We are leaving Viasno immediately. It may be that no other unit will come here, so that you must reckon with the fact that from now on your Guard may constitute the only authority. If things should turn out badly it will hand over the village to the enemy. I do not think that the worst will happen, but you have to be prepared. Moreover," continued the general, "my orders are that you and those of the younger members of the Guard who are not sons of the local peasants or people normally staying all the year round in the village, shall leave by to-morrow morning and report at Warsaw to the authorities in charge of the defence of the capital. You will hand over the command of the Civic Guard to your senior deputy. Here is a permit for your mother and sister which will allow you to travel unmolested, and sufficient petrol will be left for your journey."

The general went to say good-bye to mother and Zula and left with a large bunch of roses they had cut for him. His hurried departure and our being ordered to leave so soon were rather disquieting. While my womenfolk began to prepare for their early start, I made my way down to the village, and there made the necessary arrangements and burned some of our records. In order not to frighten people we asked Mr. Pazurski to tell them that we had left for a short course of instruction and would be back in a few days' time.

*Thursday, 14th September*

By three o'clock this morning all three of us were in the car.



I should really say four, because, of course, mother's Lala had to come too. It was still dark. Now our house was empty. Dear thing. It looked so dirty and forlorn with all its windows broken. The autumn winds and rain will blow in unhindered and, worse still, perhaps the feet of the enemy will trample its floors. Yet, the Germans have already stayed there, in 1915, and they had to leave when Poland shook off their yoke after years of suffering. Where Poland was, Poland will be again and Polish life will flourish.

We left the manor in the care of one trusted servant, Stefania, and our gardener, Stanislaus, who lived in the lodge.

Our car turned into the road and mingled in the darkness with the traffic. All lights were dimmed with dark blue paper and only showed a faint glow, but even this infuriated the passing soldiers and drivers of the convoys. As we pushed our way along it was necessary to turn up our lights from time to time and then they shouted at us to put them out and the drivers flicked the roof of the car with their whips. The road was packed with supply wagons, cars of every sort and description, and line after line of horses and soldiers. All were moving in complete darkness.

It is a queer characteristic of human nature that of all the various means of concealment and camouflage, it keeps to the black-out more effectively than any. This was only the fourteenth day of the war, yet throughout the country the observance of the black-out regulations was almost hysterical. Even the lighting of a cigarette drew forth an immediate swearing protest.

Our progress was very slow. The road was pitted with large bomb-craters and blocked by obstructions through which we had to grope our way. Every now and again there were large stones to be dodged or blocks of wood, axles and derelict vehicles. None bothered to remove them; each was only too glad if he himself avoided them safely.

Day began to break and we could distinguish the outlines of smashed wagons, large abandoned carriages and overturned cars pushed into the ditch. From time to time an unpleasant acid smell indicated the proximity of a dead horse. We stopped at intervals to listen for the sound of approaching aircraft, for in

a car all outside noise is lost in the hum of the engine. The officers had often told us that they had been attacked without even hearing the German aircraft approaching. As far as Wawer the countryside was more or less undamaged, but from there on to Warsaw we saw many shattered houses and a number which had been burned down.

There was one five-storeyed block from which the face had been completely torn, so that you could see right into all the flats. The smaller houses were burned, and all that remained of many was a chimney stack protruding from a jumble of bricks and rubble.

Near Goclavek we were stopped and our papers examined by a sentry. At Crochow we came across the first dug-outs. They were manned by soldiers with machine-guns. There were anti-tank guns, too, camouflaged with twigs and branches, and some large, red tramcars had been overturned to barricade the road. On the right was the Borkowski electrical factory—burned out—and the Wedel factory, whose excellent chocolates were famous all over Poland, had most of its windows broken. The road was so barricaded as to be nothing but a succession of hairpin bends.

Nearer the centre of the town there was, on the whole, less damage and gangs of workmen were hard at work clearing the streets of their litter. On the viaduct leading to the Third Bridge we saw an unusual sight, a party of some eighty German prisoners being marched under guard into the city. To me it seemed most extraordinary that we should be escaping so hurriedly from Viasno, while here they were taking Germans prisoner. Prisoners in the midst of fixed bayonets always suggest military success. It seemed, therefore, that the situation could not be as serious as we had thought for a moment, when the general told us to leave Viasno.

The bridge bore traces of recent bombing, but it was still useable and there were parties of workmen busy repairing the worst of the damage. Once over the bridge we were in the middle of Warsaw. Life seemed more or less normal except that there were fewer people in the streets than usual at this early hour. We turned towards the Boulevard of Ujazdov, but

it soon became evident that, not having been in the town for some time and not knowing where the barricades were, we should not be able to pass. Driving on we came across more and more elaborate barricades and soon found ourselves in a regular maze. Having got as far as the Belveder Palace we had to turn back, and decided to stop with Aunt Yani, who had a flat in a large building in the middle of the town. She lived there with her husband and two married daughters, while grandmother occupied the flat below.

As we crawled along towards the centre of the city we passed the splendid building of the Chief Inspectorate of Armed Forces with its inscription "Honour and Country" over the entrance. It, too, had suffered from the shells and part of the main cupola had been torn away. Opposite, among the flower beds, stood the lovely statue of our Chopin, composing his tunes under a willow tree.

Scores of newsvendors ran gaily along with their papers calling out "Great Polish victory near Lodz," but otherwise the streets were quiet. The passages and courtyards of the houses sheltered an army of soldiers. They were quartered in the big houses and taken to the trenches by lorry when their turn came. We saw many little detachments of riflemen bicycling along. All looked fit and were well equipped, and the general impression was one of restrained optimism and hope.

It was about half-past seven when we arrived at Aunt Yani's house and found her standing in the entrance. She was looking rather tired, having just come off night duty, and was dressed in a pair of flannel trousers and a warm coat with the familiar yellow and green armband of the A.R.P. She immediately wanted to know how things were at Viasno and, while mother went upstairs and I unloaded the car, Zula started telling her about the horrors of the bombs and how all the windows had been smashed. But Aunt Yani thought that what they had suffered in Warsaw was much worse and the two were soon hotly arguing as to which of them had been through the greater danger. Both were extremely biased.

I took a little food upstairs, but left the rest in the back of the car, which I locked safely. I did not like to pass the staring

people of the house with an armful of food when their own provisions were so short. Already I could feel that preoccupation with food which impels hungry people to keep a very close eye on their neighbours' larders. But I was wrong about it. Aunt Yani explained that at the Mayor's request each house was to have only one kitchen and that not more than one nourishing soup a day was to be served in any Warsaw household. Aunt Yani and a committee of women from the house did the cooking for all fifteen flats. There were besides many refugees in the basement which, being slightly reinforced, was called a shelter. As it was below street level and had the ground floor and five storeys above it, it probably was proof against bombs and shrapnel.

What was my surprise on coming upstairs to see father among the other members of the family:

"Good morning, father, what are you doing here?"

"How are you, my dear: I am staying here with your grandmother."

Father looked pale and not too well. There was in his face a kind of resignation such as I had never known in him before, he who had always been so staunch an advocate of opposing evil to the bitter end. Father had always scoffed at the philosophy of Ghandi and the Russian writers because they would never fight for their own cause. But now even he seemed resigned.

"Have you heard from Felix, father?"

"No, not a word since he left home."

The sight of mother and Zula energetically unpacking their things cheered him up a little, and he listened with pleasure to all I had to tell him about how splendidly mother had behaved, and the brigade, and General Anders, and our Civic Guard.

Aunt Yani wanted to impress upon us that she strictly adhered to the rules laid down by the Mayor of Warsaw, so for breakfast we had some tasteless porridge, Russian tea and sugar. We had brought our own bread with us.

"You must try a bit, auntie, and see what sort of bread our Viasno Civic Guard bakes."

After breakfast I went to Czackiego Street, where the recently formed Civic Guard had its headquarters. I first of all wanted

to affiliate our Viasno Civic Guard to the Warsaw command, and then I had to report for duty there in accordance with General Anders' order.

I have never seen a greater mess in my life than at the headquarters of the Warsaw Civic Guard. I asked to see the commander or his deputy, Mr. Gebethner, but nobody knew where either was and, from the porter up, everybody seemed surprised that anyone should want to talk business. The place rather suggested a club for gentlemen who did not know what to do with themselves. What particularly infuriated me was that they had organized their bread supply for themselves alone. The ugly and selfish side of human nature was very much in evidence in these so-called headquarters.

After hours of waiting I was finally taken in to see a polite gentleman by the name of Mr. Ettinger, who asked what he could do for me. He was a solicitor and an authority on criminal law. I explained that, having formed a Civic Guard at Viasno we thought of affiliating it with the central body at Warsaw and that General Anders had ordered me to report to them. After a very polite, but entirely futile conversation, he sent me to the Civic Commissariat of the Defence of Warsaw with an introduction to Mr. Leon Nowodworski, another distinguished lawyer, who was supposed to be in charge of the legal department. From that moment I began a peregrination from Annas to Caiaphas, and from one authority to another, none having the faintest idea what to do and some not even existing. Even in the presence of the enemy bureaucrats will remain bureaucrats—inefficient, stupid and dead.

The Civic Commissariat of the Defence of Warsaw was in the town hall, in and out of which passed a thin stream of men and women wearing the yellow armbands of the Warsaw Guard or the white and red of the Defence Commissariat. When I arrived and asked to see Mr. Nowodworski I was told that he was only taking up his office to-day and that no one knew at what time he was expected, but, as there was not much shelling, he might turn up at any moment. Once more I waited in vain and was finally put on to a colonel attached to the Commissariat. This

colonel, whose name I do not remember, was a very busy man, judging from the number of people standing outside in the corridor and peeping through the keyhole, and the fawning servility of the porters when they entered his room bore witness to his importance. Among the crowd I discovered Mr. Witover, still cherubic, smiling and wearing what was by now probably his fourth armband.

My conversation with the colonel was very short. I told him what our Civic Guard had done and when I mentioned that we were issuing arms licences because the police had left the village, I was curtly told that I could be court-martialled for such an offence.

"Is that all the help and advice you can give our organization?" I asked. "Then I am much obliged to you for your kindness, and only sorry to have taken up your valuable time," and I left the room without actually banging the door, but feeling very disgusted and depressed.

Oh, those bureaucrats! That paralysing bureaucracy! It was guilty of so many evils in Poland. Servile to its superiors, ruthless and haughty to the small man, pandering to the average taste, never ahead of events, wanting in initiative; it is the same in Poland, in Russia, in Honolulu, in Whitehall. It fears criticism, it is paralysed by routine, it chooses the way of least resistance; taking cover behind the signature of its superiors it shifts responsibility on to others and chokes every creative idea.

It was in this state of mind that I reached home to find grandmother and Aunt Yani's two daughters there to share our one-course lunch. In the middle of it Dr. Kiemnowicz appeared. He had brought part of his ambulance unit safely back to Warsaw and was now attached to one of the hospitals, where he was to work under his old university professor. Lucky fellow that Kiemnowicz! He could get the kind of work that best suited his talents, while I still had to battle with bureaucrats in an attempt to get any sort of job at all.

I felt the best thing I could do would be to return to Viasno and my Civic Guard, and I spent the afternoon at the Warsaw Command trying to obtain the special permit which was neces-

sary before one was allowed to go farther east of Warsaw than the suburb of Targowek. A very obliging officer tried to get in touch with the appropriate authorities on the telephone, but no one could inform us whether it was possible to return, so I had to wait. And the waiting was exasperating, when one was so deeply anxious to help.

In the evening Stan Kiemnowicz and I moved to the ground floor, where we took possession of a timber merchant's office and two very comfortable mattresses which were stored with some furniture there. Stan had already developed a marvellous capacity for forgetting the existence of private property. He was thrilled at the idea of his hospital work and that gave him courage. He had perfect faith in the High Command. He was doing his own job as well as he could, and imagined that everybody was like him. He was quite convinced that there was some logical plan behind all our movements and that the Germans would undoubtedly soon fall into our trap.

Before long we both slept like tops.

*Friday, 15th September*

Everybody in Warsaw wants to help, but the only way is by not eating. There are too many mouths to feed and too many willing hands. Nobody is wanted. I was longing to be up and doing. If only they would find me a rifle, a commission, any job no matter what, as long as I was helping. Not just to be left here to rot listening to the shells and bombs exploding.

This has been a sad day. The artillery was active nearly all the morning pounding away at Warsaw from the direction of Praga and Wola; a desperate fight must have been going on there—a furious fight.

I have invented a drug against bombs and shells. It is to write things in my diary just as they happen. As I have absolutely nothing to do, I sit at the table on the ground floor and write. I know that I am writing sentimental stuff, and I don't like sentiment. But I write it and cross it out afterwards. How can I describe what is happening when I have no part in it? I am condemned to inactivity, I feel caged-in, impotent; I envy anybody

who has even the smallest job to do. But my anti-shrapnel medicine does work. The bombs are exploding with terrific detonations followed by the sharp crushing noise of crumbling walls—and I go on writing.

Zula, seeing me with my diary, to-day decided that she must also have one. Hers is more concerned with domestic matters, but probably she finds as much comfort in recording them as I from my observations. There is no doubt about it, my nerves are worn out. I feel drowsy and my mind is not working properly. I think of London, of my friends abroad. Shall I ever see Piccadilly again? Shall I ever again take part in scientific discussions? Why do I feel so heavy? There must be a great number of wounded soldiers in the hospital at the University. A tremendous lot. So many splinters. What colossal destruction there must be in Poland; starvation will threaten the country. And the bombs fall, destroying, burning, killing. Compared with that everything pales into insignificance.

A renewed outburst of shelling rouses me from my reverie. Our guns answer shot for shot. Once again they have silenced the Germans. It is quiet now. Time to go out.

As I had nothing to do that morning, it had been arranged that I should go with mother in the car to fetch a large consignment of Penguin ice cream for the soldiers, which was being presented by the owner of the factory. He was one of the innumerable people whose generosity for the army was real and unbounded. After all, didn't they defend him and his business? What would be the value of all his riches if Warsaw fell? We were told to take the whole load to the sub-commander of the Women's Auxiliary Force, who would help mother to distribute it.

To reach the factory we had to go right down to the end of Zelazna Street and when we got there we found the street closed. We soon saw why. A large block of flats, two or three houses away, had just been hit and the whole middle part of the building was nothing but a heap of bricks and rubble. A squad of firemen was clearing the debris, removing the dangerous walls and bringing down the balconies. The side walls were intact, but the



building had no middle, which gave it the appearance of a huge letter V.

In the factory yard were three large lorries loading boxes full of hundreds of ices for the soldiers. These were very efficiently packed in cardboard, which kept them intact for a whole day. Warsaw was rapidly exhausting her stores, for the consumption of the army was enormous and no fresh supplies could be obtained. As ours was only a small car, it did not take us long to fill it. When Mr. Penguin, as we called the director of the factory, saw a lady at the wheel he produced a box of twenty-four bricks which he gave to mother personally.

The distribution of the ices gave me some idea of the organization of the Warsaw defence. Soldiers were stationed in all the houses. In one of the large insurance buildings in Moniuszko Street they were busy cleaning rifles and machine-guns which were stacked in piles on the floor. This was a detachment which was due to leave for an advanced barricade that afternoon. Their field guns were stationed in Napoleon Square, while the horses and limbers were scattered over the whole quarter. It is difficult to hide guns and supplies in a town so that they cannot be seen, but the command of the Warsaw defence seemed to have done it somehow.

The appearance of ices was received enthusiastically by all the soldiers. Only one could not eat his choc-bar, and that was the sentry, so I put it in a cool place, where it would not melt before he came off duty. We also distributed our wares in the hospitals. Our entrance into one ward filled with wounded soldiers was the signal for a tremendous uproar and a forest of arms was raised beseeching for ice. This cannot have been good for the more seriously wounded, but their well-being did not count for much when ices were being distributed, and anyway, no one paid much attention to them in this hospital, which was already filled to overflowing and could not satisfy even the rudiments of comfort. At the few other hospitals we visited, we decided to leave the ices with the matron so that they could be distributed peacefully after lunch.

In the afternoon I set out on my round again, one of the

unemployed looking for a job. I read this morning that they were recruiting at the offices of the Socialist paper, *The Worker*. The Socialist party have behaved wonderfully during the siege. They were most active in helping to organize labour battalions for the defence of the capital and maintained their magnificent traditions of fighting for independence. Putting aside all the stale and obsolete doctrines of Marxism about the purity of the movement, they rolled up their sleeves and helped. This was not talk, it was work. Though successive governments have precluded them from having any share in the machinery of the State, they have shown an organization much superior to anything in the country. Their recruiting office was at 7 Warecka Street and they were ready to take people who did not belong to the party. Unfortunately, when I arrived there, I found a large notice on the door: "No more enrolling this week."

From Warecka Street I dashed to the Red Cross, where I found the wide staircase almost blocked by an enormous queue of young women waiting to be enrolled as nurses. I asked to see Mrs. Roskowska, who was in charge of the youth section and a friend of mine. Years ago when I was a student, I used to work in the Red Cross, but now the organization had increased enormously and Mrs. Roskowska was the only one left in it I knew. But even her intervention did not help and I was asked to wait patiently till some job could be found for me.

Our street was full of refugee peasants from the west. Hopeless and destitute, they had come with their carts and horses and the few belongings they had succeeded in snatching from their homes. The horses looked half-starved, as indeed they were, for supplies of forage were running very short. Outside our window a baby was crying querulously, while its starved-looking mother tried to silence it at her breast. Time did not count with these unfortunates. They were just waiting.

Along all the streets soldiers are lashing telephone wires to lamp-posts and branches of the trees to connect the centre of the town with the suburbs and the barricades—the real theatre of war. They brought the reports of the heroic resistance of our soldiers, how we wished they would bring the news that the

terrible German onslaught was slackening. But good news was not for Warsaw to-day. The city was surrounded. That was obvious, seeing that shells were now also coming from the south and east. It was also generally believed that the Germans were in Siedlce. The only better news was that of the destruction of a German armoured column near Kaluszyn and the annihilation of another regiment.

The bombardment continued throughout the night.

*Saturday, 16th September*

Our womenfolk have developed a genius for buying food where one would least expect to find it. True, prices have begun to soar and you cannot buy what is wanted, but Aunt Yani and mother always succeed in bringing home something with which to eke out our store and give us what one might call dinner.

To-day I accompanied mother on one of her expeditions. Before we started we bespattered the car with mud to make it less shiny. This was supposed to be a necessary precaution against aeroplanes—at least everybody was doing it.

We wanted to go to our home, which was in the southern suburb. Now that we lived in the centre, Mokotow seemed very far away. Distances stretch in times of danger and our little trip appeared quite an adventure. We did not know what obstacles lay ahead and we might get cut off when the shelling started again, and if our home telephone were damaged, we should be unable to put a call through, as the company was repairing only official lines. The largest and most elaborate barricade was in the Union of Lublin Square. It only left a narrow passage free and this could be closed at a moment's notice with the stones and tramcars they had there in readiness. Near some of the barricades were heaps of bottles of various sizes waiting to be filled with petrol and thrown at any tanks which might break through. Warsaw was getting ready to defend every district, every street, every house.

We were one of the few families in Warsaw lucky enough still to have a car and petrol. Most of those one saw in the streets were either military cars or ambulances. On the southern road

we passed a small cart coming down from Wierzbno with a load of vegetables. We stopped it and mother bought some cabbages, carrots, and twenty pounds of potatoes at prices that were extremely high. Nevertheless the whole load was snapped up in the twinkling of an eye.

With the trenches and large booms across the streets, it was difficult to reach our house. Once there we found all in order; no panes were broken and our Bronka seemed to have looked after everything very well. The cook was now spending all her time at the shelter and the gardener came only now and then, as most of his days were divided between long hours spent queuing for bread or with the soldiers quartered in the neighbouring houses. The next door house had a largish shell-hole but on the whole our district bore little damage. We stopped long enough to collect some clothes and to leave money for Bronka, and got on our way again.

Mother did not like being out in the streets and drove back as fast as circumstances allowed. The shelling might start again at any moment and then heaven knows how long we might have to shelter in somebody else's house.

Both sides of the streets were lined with row upon row of people—food queues. As I left the car I took my place in one for butter, which was now only sold in small quantities. The sound of the clocks striking mid-day was drowned in a sudden shattering explosion which shook the whole street. Hard on its heels came a second and closer one, followed by the sound of falling masonry. So the Germans had started again, and with their heavy artillery. The queues wavered and broke as the people ran for shelter in the passages in the houses, while shell followed shell. The Germans seemed to be aiming near St. Alexander's Square. They trained their guns on the church! Most of the shells exploded in the air, so that only the splinters struck the houses. I took shelter in a house in Krucza Street and had hardly got inside when a shell struck No. 24, a few doors away. The walls seemed to crumble and a cascade of bricks tumbled on to the street.

Shells were also falling around Bracka Street, near the Central Station. But now our guns replied, raising their voices from the

various squares in an attempt to silence the enemy. Indeed, a quarter of an hour later the fire did slacken and finally died away.

The streets, which had been nearly deserted, now filled again with people. I emerged from my passage and walked on to Aunt Yani's house. Every now and again I had to clamber round piles of debris and from time to time a stretcher party passed carrying some wounded man or woman. But I don't think the toll of life had been very large.

I walked up the stairs and burst into the flat to find the whole family glued to the windows by a terrible spectacle. The Evangelic Church, one of the landmarks of old Warsaw, had been hit by an incendiary bomb and was all ablaze. A heavy cloud of black smoke writhed up from it, cut through by red zig-zag flames. It was sad to see this lofty, elegant structure, with its dome supporting an enormous golden cross, now meeting its doom. For years and years that golden cross had dominated the whole district; now it defended itself against the fire. Enveloped in smoke, surrounded by a sea of flames, it defended itself as a sign of protest against what was going on in Warsaw. The fire attacked the church from all sides and, darting up through the dome, crept to the foot of the golden cross, covering it with a layer of soot, but the cross still dominated and withstood. The walls began to crack under the excessive heat and blocks of stone came crashing to the pavement. The dome was now tilted sideways, but still it supported the golden cross which threw back the glare of the devastating flames. Then, in the end, the dome crumbled and, with the cross, collapsed inside the church. The church now looked like a blazing stone basket or, with its oblong windows all around, one might have said a glowing coliseum suspended in the sky.

All that will be left when the flames die down will be the round walls and the stone staircase. Erected for the service of Christ, admired by our grandfathers and our great-grandfathers, one of the familiar sights of Warsaw graces the city no more.

And the Germans go on shelling Warsaw, while its citizens hide in the lower floors of the buildings and await their fate. Those in search of safety are continuously changing their abode,

moving from the centre to the suburbs, from the suburbs to the centre. Often it is mere chance, often instinct which makes them pack their things and go, sometimes the example or advice of friends who say that this district is safer than that. Often their motives are trifling; a bottle of fruit-juice left behind in the larder there, a packet of macaroni, a sick aunt, a mattress. Whatever it may be, they move and often get cut off, to the dismay of their relatives and friends who do not know what has happened to them.

The whistling of the shells is horrible. Some have a high note, others low; but when they whistle they are invariably enemy. Our shells do not whistle. Our guns are in the Saxony Gardens and they answer the Germans shell for shell, sometimes more.

Once again the Germans have come to us with their "cultural mission" and thrust themselves between us and the democratic civilization of the west, which so many of us like and respect. My friends are far away, some of them, perhaps, even still studying or continuing their research work. Think of that. We are separated by a barrier of barbarism, my friends and I. Will they ever be able to understand the hell we have gone through? I certainly do not feel capable of describing adequately all the suffering that is going on here. Besides, I do not think they can possibly conceive it.

How dark it's getting. Yet my watch says only four o'clock. Did I forget to wind it up? No. Then this must be an extraordinarily black cloud.

And at four o'clock God gave us rain—torrential rain, for which the whole country had been praying for sixteen days, rain and enormous hail stones. I have never seen such a downpour. Is this the sign that the turn has come? Is to-day's destruction of Warsaw to be avenged? Is it indeed help from Heaven?

At half-past four our house was hit by a shell. It exploded above the house and struck the top floor, damaging the roof, from which it tore a large piece of tinplate. This was the first time I had come in direct contact with the shells, but it really did not seem so terrible. The explosion, of course, was deafeningly loud and some people were excessively frightened, especially

by the fumes and smell of the explosives. One or two yelled out: "Gas! Gas!" but there was no panic. All the same, many people spent most of the rest of the day sitting on the stairs. Fortunately no one was injured. Grannie admitted that "it had deafened her a little," but refused to move downstairs. No amount of persuasion could make her leave her precious third floor.

At five o'clock the shells were still falling. It was an intermittent, yet horribly persistent fire, and it harassed our nerves all right. Even brave Aunt Yani said: "The ravens will feed on our graves before long." I write madly at my diary, entering the least little detail and everything anybody says; but people say so little. As a matter of fact, other people's cackling is excessively annoying. What does it matter what he or she thinks! They should all shut up.

The shells seem to be coming from Karczew or Otwock, or perhaps even nearer. According to the wireless Hel and Gdynia are still holding out. History will remember them.

*Sunday, 17th September*

Sunday, God's day, yet more shells have fallen on Warsaw to-day than on any other. Gradually everything is being destroyed. This morning they started shooting from somewhere beyond Praga—a merciless rain of shells.

Bang! Our house has been hit again. The shrapnel has struck the lift shaft, damaging the whole staircase and the adjoining flats. The shock of the explosion was tremendous and for some time a dense cloud of fumes and dust hung over the whole house. The electric light went out, plaster fell from the ceiling, making a fearful mess, and there is hardly a pane of glass unbroken in the whole building. The Starch Cartel has its offices next door to us. Its books are scattered all over the place and the jealously guarded secrets of this monopoly lie there for all to read. I did glance through one of their ledgers.

People were indignant—"Can't something be done to stop this mad destruction?" "That maniac." "That hangman!" But how ineffectual it all sounds.

In the face of all this destruction, this wholesale devastation, what significance have the values and virtues we accept and respect in time of peace—the arts and sciences, property, mercy, law and order? Here is death and the destruction of all we cherished as beautiful and valuable. One street after another is being destroyed with the typical systematic thoroughness of the German—from Powisle to the western suburbs. And still Warsaw holds out proud and undaunted. Mayor Starzynski keeps our spirits up. We are told to defend Warsaw, defend the name of Poland. And we shall.

Our Royal Castle is on fire. Our proud castle of Warsaw which we restored at so much expense and trouble. Nothing is sacred to the enemy. Even our art treasures and monuments are in his way. With the castle, like a sentry at his post, perished its curator, Mr. Brokel, a personal friend of ours and a man whose taste and erudition we all respected. At least Hitler will never admire the city of Warsaw from its castle, as in March, from the Hradczyn, he admired Prague.

I have not been in the old town since the war began, but the papers say that a shell hit the Cathedral of St. John just when High Mass was being celebrated. The picture gallery of Zacheta has also been damaged.

They say that the Germans fired five thousand rounds against Warsaw last night. We look at each other in surprise and ask: "How it is possible we survived that?" and many add: "Most likely we shall not all survive, but Poland will." I understand now how much truth there is in our national anthem, which begins with the confident words: "Poland is not lost, as long as we live." That always used to strike me as being nonsensical. It was all right for the legions of General Dabrowski to sing that when they fought under Napoleon in 1797 and later, but nowadays, I thought, there was no sense in the words. Now I understand them.

The Berlin wireless to-day announced that the Germans are not bombing Warsaw. True, but they are shelling it instead—from sunrise to sunset, twenty shells an hour. The streets are littered with dead horses, mangled bodies and debris. There was another



appeal to-day for beds and bedding for the wounded soldiers. There is a shortage of accommodation in the hospitals.

The German command to-day sent an ultimatum demanding the surrender of the town. General Czuma did not even receive their emissary. We shall defend Warsaw to the last man.

It has started raining again. This time a proper thunderstorm. How queerly thin the thunder sounds among the bursting of the shells, as if the forces of nature were weaker than those of man. That does not sound right, but so it is. This rain will wash some of the blood off the streets. Fall rain, fall, Poland needs you!

And the shells continue to whizz and bang. Hyfuyuyuyubaleeeebang! They sound different by day, by night, on a dry day, on a wet day, expected or unexpected. I tried to compare their sound with something. Perhaps a light truck running on very loosely laid rails would make some similar hollow rushing.

What an idiot I was! A few weeks ago I still maintained that there would be no war. I never studied any war problems.

*That was close! But still only close.*

*Monday, 18th September*

A depressing morning, with the papers full of dreadful news. I have a feeling that now that she has settled her differences with Japan, Russia will start making demands on us. There has been no shooting and everything is very quiet. Rumour has it that the German Command have given the considerable number of foreign diplomats still here time to leave the beleaguered city. Or perhaps this silence is the harbinger of the better news for which we are all so avid.

At 11.50 a.m. fifty German aeroplanes appeared over the city and were met by strong artillery fire. To-day they did not drop any bombs and after circling round for a quarter of an hour disappeared again.

Taking advantage of the lull I went out and made another unsuccessful attempt to enrol in the Civic Guard. I have lost all hope of being taken, but there is nothing more I can do, however painful it is not to be able to help my country.

As it was still quiet I ran to the county offices thinking they might be able to tell me how things were at Viasno, to which I wanted to return. I could only find one person there and he told me that my question came under the Official Secrets Act, which probably meant that he did not know.

The Civil Defence of Warsaw has now been properly organized under that marvellous Mayor Starzynski. Indeed, there is an entirely different spirit in the town hall since he took it over. For one thing, he has chosen men with professional training for the jobs he gives them. Supplies and distribution, for instance, are being looked after by the professors and representatives of the co-operative movement. Mr. Jablonski and Professor Rapacki, of the High School of Commerce, were already organizing the supply of potatoes. Special parties were detailed to dig them in the fields surrounding Warsaw—an extremely dangerous job, as the German pilots find the diggers an easy prey. But the parties do not usually leave the city till the evening and work through the night, returning with their potatoes in the early hours of the morning.

Twelve o'clock was the time limit for the foreign diplomats to have left the town, but to our great surprise it passed without the shelling being resumed, and a wave of optimism swept through the city. Perhaps there had been some other successes like those at Lodz, Kutno and Lwów. There was talk of the Germans having been halted and you could see smiles on peoples' faces again.

Things seemed so much improved that we decided we would have our soup upstairs in grannie's flat, where we could eat it decently at a proper table. But we had scarcely dipped in our spoons before it all started again and we had to seize our plates and rush down to the ground floor. But the shelling to-day was not half as bad as yesterday.

After lunch I had some money matters to attend to and went to the Post Office Savings Bank to see if I could get into our safe. Unfortunately this was impossible, for the bank had suffered so badly in the bombardment that it was closed, and the porters told me to come back the next day between twelve and one. The

bank building consisted of a number of individual houses which had been thrown into one, and in normal times had the prettiest window boxes in Warsaw, ablaze with pansies and geraniums. But now it was pitted with red brickly wounds. In an even worse state was the Prudential skyscraper. It was badly holed and the second, third and fourth floors were burning with long tongues of flame licking out of the windows. Two motor pumps and a squad of firemen were endeavouring to localize the fire. I could not help wondering if the company had insured its own building against loss and damage—with itself perhaps?

The square in front of the huge building was considered the most dangerous spot in all Warsaw and people passed it as quickly as they could, some even running. In contrast to the majority was Mr. George Kowalewski, a sportsman and familiar figure in Warsaw, who, dressed in a green felt cowboy's hat and a pair of long, laced shooting boots, stalked across the square as though he were out hunting lions.

Grannie had made two hundred cigarettes and to-day I took these to the university which was now a military hospital. Its lecture rooms had been turned into wards, and learning and study had given place to the art of healing. Even the zoological museum was now part of the hospital. Ambulances kept coming and going, and outside the philosophy seminar were piles of cotton wool and lint soaked in blood and pus. Everything is on a large scale in such a hospital, including blood.

I went into one of the wards. The atmosphere was one of resolution and will to live. Scarcely anyone groaned or complained. With feverish eyes the soldiers listened to the wireless giving news of the various successes scored by their comrades in the field and of the gallant defence of Warsaw. The better bits of news were greeted by a cheer. When it was over one of the nurses announced that a certain artist was going to recite a few poems and sing them some popular songs. He had just begun a poem about the gay King Krakus who defied the greedy dragon, when a door opened and out of an operating theatre emerged a ghastly lacerated figure leaning on a soldier. One foot was gone and its head was swathed in bandages. The poem was interrupted

to allow this nightmare figure to pass, and the gay King Krakus waited, on the lips of the artist, while brilliant eyes staring from their pillows followed its painful progress to the door. The singer was about to continue when the figure halted before a stretcher on which lay a human wreck even more mangled than he. The stretcher-bearers stepped aside to let him by, then their cortège passed down the ward to the other door. The soldiers watched it from their beds, and probably thought: "Well, I'm lucky. There are tragedies even worse than mine," and settled down to listen to the story of the gay King Krakus. The ward became filled with rhymes about exploits of the king, the dragon, and his beautiful daughter, but again the poem was interrupted when a sister asked the performer to stop, while they closed the door of the operating theatre, where the king was not wanted.

On my way home I passed St. Roch's Hospital, which had a large notice on the door to say that all gas cases were to be taken to Copernicus Street; I passed the church of the Holy Cross, its fractured tympanum covered with rubble, but the figure of Christ holding His Cross was still erect. Some serious gaps were visible in the Ministry of Home Affairs, but it still held together.

There were long queues outside nearly all the shops, waiting for whatever was to be had; a quarter of butter, two ounces of salt, a quarter of oatmeal, a few pickled herrings—but above all bread. These queues were the reason why the air raids and shelling caused such a large number of casualties, larger than in the sieges of other towns. Also they included a larger proportion of poor people, since the rich had servants to send to stand in the queues and larger stocks of provisions at home. When people are hungry, they do not pay much heed to bullets.

I am proud to say that to-day I succeeded in buying seven large waffles, for which I paid the fantastic price of one shilling and a penny. In normal times they cost a halfpenny each. Everybody laughed at me when I brought them triumphantly home. Admittedly there is not much to eat in a waffle, which is as thin as paper, but it does taste nice. Nor could I ever aspire to be as efficient a forager as Aunt Yani or mother.

The lower staircase, all the basements (the so-called shelter) and

all the lower storeys are full of people, some strangers, others whom we know. Life is becoming gradually more and more communal. The upper storeys simply moved downstairs and accommodated themselves in other people's flats. And, of course, no one could protest. People very soon forgot all about the old-fashioned peacetime notion of the sacredness of private property.

When Stan Kiemnowicz and I moved into our offices, Aunt Yani was most indignant and said we were ruining our reputations, but two days later she herself was happily settled on the floor above us, in a flat which certainly did not belong to her. Many of those sheltering in our house came from the western provinces, among them a rich landowner who had a model dairy farm with 200 cows. They were all specially bred, the result of twenty years' work, and had earned him several diplomas and honourable mentions even at foreign shows. Now he had escaped with his young wife and baby and a nurse. The nurse was feeding the baby from a bottle, saying: "Drink, drink, little baby, or else you will be lean." And baby drank the milk obtained with such difficulty. How are we going to feed the babies now?

In the street are many refugee peasants with their carts. One of the horses died to-day, probably of starvation. One man passing remarked: "Now that we are down to one plate of soup a day, we shall all go the same way as that horse. The papers tell us about the hunger in Germany and the shortage of everything there. But we are not merely hungry, we are starving."

He was, of course, exaggerating, but this will happen if the siege lasts many days longer. Perhaps the long-awaited help would come from our armies which were still intact outside the German ring. If we could only hold out help would come. After all our General Staff and the Allies must have some sort of plan.

The German news contained a very silly, yet annoying lie. They said that the Government and Marshal Smigly-Rydz had left Poland and were now interned in Roumania. They also rubbed it in that they had taken a considerable amount of money and gold with them. That in itself was enough to show that the whole report was fictitious. Possibly our Marshal had gone

to confer with the Roumanian Government, but no doubt he was now back again in the country.

The Civic Guard to-day commandeered one of the ground-floor flats for a first-aid post and casualty clearing station. They have already got it organized with two nurses in trim white uniforms and a woman doctor in command. It is very nice to have a first-aid post actually in the building. The post had hardly been in existence an hour before a woman was brought in. She was young, pretty and intelligent looking. In spite of a wound in the abdomen and two splinters, one in the neck and the other in the fore-arm, she kept gay and smiling. Either the wound could not have hurt her very much, or else she was unusually brave. At times she was so gay that she might merely have been in bed with a slight cold. And she kept repeating: "I hope I haven't been wounded in vain. But never mind, we'll celebrate victory before long, when I promise you all to feel quite well."

She had been put on a divan near the best wireless, the pivotal point of the house. She was our heroine and we saw that she was never alone. Somebody was always there to keep her company and listen to the wireless. Her name was Halina Kentner; she was married, but recently separated from her husband whom she still loved affectionately. She had returned to Warsaw just before war broke out from one of our spas to which she had gone to recover from the shock. Now all that belonged to the past and, in spite of all she had been through, she managed to be always cheerful.

The day has ended as badly as it began. My presentiment of the morning was confirmed on the wireless this evening. On the pretext of protecting our minorities Russian troops have entered Poland in flagrant violation of the non-aggression pact Stalin signed with us. This puts Poland in the worst possible predicament. With Germany and Russia acting together we are faced with the spectre of another partition.

*Tuesday, 19th September*

Last night there was one more in our bedroom downstairs.

Father has come to stay. He spent the night in a large armchair, saying he preferred that to lying on a mattress in all his clothes.

"I could not possibly undress for the night; it would take too long to put my shoes on if the alarm sounded."

Throughout the night we could very distinctly hear the noise of the battle in progress on the right bank of the Vistula. The machine-guns hardly ever stopped rattling and a mighty cannonade kept us anxiously awake. However, the sound of battle did not seem to draw any closer, so presumably their attempt to pierce the line had failed again. What a magnificent resistance our men are putting up. Grochow must be a shambles. I expect the Germans have left a mountain of dead behind, as they did in previous attacks. The noise died down about five this morning and we were able to snatch a few hours' rest.

Aunt Yani has found an old-fashioned coal boiler in a flat on the third floor and this morning we all indulged in the luxury of a hot bath. What a difference it makes.

At morning tea the talk was of nothing but the sinking of the aircraft-carrier *Courageous* by a German U-boat.

"I am an old man," said father, "and have always had great confidence in and respect for the British, but for some time now they have been letting me down. I don't know what is the matter with them. They allowed the Germans to dupe them and build up their might again. They have been more absorbed in petty jealousies of France than in stopping the progress of Hitlerism, where their real interest lies. There is too much talk about peace in Britain and too little will to preserve it. How could they have been so blind. I don't think the old lion has lost his teeth yet, but he has disappointed me all the same. Won't the Germans just boast and make capital out of sinking the *Courageous*."

Others joined in and soon there was a regular discussion raging. In the middle of it all Mrs. Lekaska walked in. She was a poetess and a great friend of mother's. But what has happened to her lumbago and her weak heart? She is looking ten years younger, talking as fast as ever and swallowing her words as she always does.

"What sort of a job do you do, Rose?" said mother, seeing the armlet of the Polish Radio on her smart costume.

"Oh, my dear, most interesting. We write the little stories for the soldiers and the poems and talks you hear on the wireless. Then we translate the foreign broadcasts. We have our hands full, I can assure you. Nearly all our staff are newcomers, but so keen. We absolutely crave for work."

Zula pricked up her ears at this and asked if she could not help. Mrs. Lekanska promised to speak to the head of the section and see if they could not find a job for her.

"It would be much better for you than just staying here all day long with the panicky refugees and nothing to think about but shelling. Believe me we have not time to pay any attention to explosions." Then, with a look at her wrist watch, she added: "Now I must be going, we have to start work on our evening programme."

Indeed, the sight of those crowds of homeless people crouching in our cellars, cut off from the light of day and fed only once every twenty-four hours by Aunt Yani, was one to depress the most insensitive. Aunt Yani always referred to them as "the people of the catacombs." The others who had taken shelter in the building were also a gloomy lot. They were continually on the search for food, their only interest and topic of conversation. Hunger grows every day and it is increasingly difficult to get milk foods for the children. The Food Control had arranged some depots, but the number of cows in the suburbs is extremely limited and even more so the fodder for them. One father in our house was on the point of committing suicide because he could not get milk for his baby. He wanted to cross the trenches and go to the Germans and implore them to give him some. That, of course, would have been pure folly. The women who have been caught on the other side of the trenches were forced to work for the Germans, to wash their linen, and some were even shot at.

The Civic Guard has started to reorganize its activities and is going to appoint one representative in each block of flats. It seems that we are going to have several competing organizations in each house—the A.R.P. Service, the Social Assistance Service,



and now the Civic Guard. It seems a little too much, but as they have asked me to be the representative for our block I accepted. All the representatives are to meet to-day in the Citizen's Club *Resursa* some distance away, near the Old Town and the Royal Castle. In other circumstances I should never have gone so far for fear of being cut off, but having a meeting to attend I was glad to go, as the walk would take me past the Castle and give me an opportunity of seeing how much it had been damaged by the fire and shells.

Despite some shelling I got there as the clock struck twelve. Besides myself there were some others from our street all waiting for Mr. Jerzy Kurcusz to arrive, a young lawyer who was a commissioner of the Guard and the man we were to meet. He was to explain to us what we had to do. After waiting more than half-an-hour I decided to go, thinking it rather strange for a person to ask one to attend a meeting at the risk of one's life and then not to go himself. But I did not want to be uncharitable, as he might easily have met with some mishap. So many people fixed appointments and never kept them. Then the next day you learned that a man had been taken to hospital or killed.

The Royal Castle was quite near, but it was no longer the lovely building I was accustomed to see. Gone was that dignified grandeur, that clean elegance of line. The well-placed tower with the clocks on either side and its plated undulating roof in the form of a carrot with its long knotty stem ending in a tiny weather vane was no longer there. But saddest of all was the appearance of the copper roof on the main body of the castle. It was corrugated and in places had sagged under its own weight, where the fire had destroyed the beams below. I could well imagine the damage that must have been done inside. The ensign of the President of the Republic was still flying from its mast, but the head of Poland's Government was no longer in Poland. He and his Government had gone to Roumania. That was sad, but it was not the first time in our history it had happened. King John Kazimir also had to leave the country at the time of the enemy "deluge," but a little time later he was back once more. However,

history read about in books is one thing, and that enacted before your eyes an entirely different matter.

I did not linger long. The sight of the mutilated castle was too depressing. As I walked back home I was several times stopped by people asking the way to this or that street or square. It seems so strange when people don't know the Piccadillys and Leicester Squares of your town. But there are so many refugees in Warsaw. Some of them are hungry, terribly hungry. They have had nothing to eat for several days and implore the passers-by to give them some money and tell them where they can get a drop of soup. They point to their miserable looking children and beg you to have pity on them. Yet what can you do, however much you pity their misery? Many of the Civic Guard posts have been directing them to stations where refugees are supposed to be looked after, but in reality these stations are sheer mockery. There is invariably an enormous queue, but no food or drink. There is no doubt that the refugees have been suffering agonizing hunger for the last day or two.

A little boy in patched trousers passed with his mother across the square. He paused to investigate a barrel and, finding a little putty at the bottom, called out to her triumphantly: "Mummy, mummy, here is a little butter for us!"

As I passed along one of the main streets I became aware of a most offensive smell. The stink became worse and sharper, and I looked round to discover the cause: two men with a stretcher on which lay a body beneath some rugs. It had been recovered from a ruined house, where it had lain for several days and so was in an advanced stage of decomposition. The two men brought their load to the lawn opposite the Simon Restaurant, where they buried it hastily. Goya would have painted that scene in his "Horrors of War."

This was not the first grave to be dug in that square.

On returning home nowadays you have to give a very full summary of all the latest news in town. Few venture out or far afield and those who do and return unscathed are subjected to a battery of questions. What happened here? What is the situation there? Does such and such a building still stand? Is it

true that Targowek has no more water? It has even become a kind of game to get in first with your news.

"What did you see on your way?"

"Well, a shell had exploded at No. 2 Holy Cross Street and it is said two people were killed."

"Oh, we know that; it is near our house. But tell us, have you seen the Castle?"

And I had to give a full description of everything. But fortunately the rush of questions was interrupted by the arrival of two officers on motor-bicycles in the yard, who asked to see the caretaker. They said that they wished to see the stables and garages, and having inspected them, told him that in a short time he would receive 24 new motor-bicycles belonging to the army.

"You will be personally responsible for these motor-bicycles and when they arrive, sign the receipt to say that you have duly received them for storage."

We were all most interested to know where these motor-bicycles came from; some thought it was a consignment sent to us by our allies. But Kiemnowicz soon unwrapped the mystery. As he was in uniform it was easier for him to find things out. What had happened was that in view of the destruction caused by the bombardment and thinking that it would be intensified once the foreign diplomats had left, the Warsaw Command thought it wise to distribute their military supplies all over the city.

Having found out that much Stan Kiemnowicz lost no time in "commandeering" one for himself, as he "needed" it for going to and from the hospital. After all the goods were there and they might as well be used—and it was much nicer to go on a motor-bicycle. He even solved the problem of petrol.

I realized to-day that I have not read a serious book since the war began. Though I took a book on dynamics in my rucksack when we went to Viasno, the theory of value and all elasticities seemed such remote nonsense there. I also tried to read a book on the new German Empire, but found it long-winded and boring. Here were the Germans actually trying to force us into their cursed empire and the pre-war academic inferences on the subject seemed quite irrelevant in the face of the reality. The only book which

I really read with pleasure was *Alice in Wonderland*. The little rabbit, the hatter, the good little girl were in such complete contrast to what was going on here, that they gave me an outlet into a different world. Everything else was trash.

I understood now why, after the experience of war, men for some time often feel an abhorrence of elevating, beautifully elaborated theories which are not based on a genuine knowledge of facts and human character. They have seen facts—horrible and brutal facts, which is probably why soldiers, finding the politicians and arm-chair philosophers with reach-me-down schemes for peace and sugar-coated ideologies, become either thoroughly disgusted or fall victim to extreme political doctrines. This tug-of-war between common-sense and gowned and academic aberration and well-intentioned pulpitering has once already ended in such a peace that twenty years later we have had to march back into the trenches. Will this war produce another Clemenceau to fight and this time win the battle against gowned imbecility?

This evening I took a whole pile of the *Literary News* to read to Mrs. Halina. We all spoil her, each bringing her what he can—a flower, a pot of jam, and she always keeps smiling and laughing, wrinkling her pretty eyebrows. But we did not feel like reading to-night. It was impossible to concentrate. One article dealt with a surrealist exhibition, another studied the difficulties of translating Pushkin into a foreign language, and a third occupied itself with the maternal pedigree of Alexander Dumas. Good Lord, who could be interested in all that at such a time. We had seen too much, our nerves were strained and what we needed was relaxation. Someone turned the wireless on louder to drown the noise of the bursting shells. That was the best kind of music for us—waltzes and blues, and our special swingy Warsaw tangos. Two nurses in white with lovely rosy faces passed lightly through the room, stepping almost as if they were dancing in time to the music.

Suddenly Stan Kiemnowicz, himself a doctor, said: "Hey, nurse, who knows whether to-morrow we shall be alive, what about a turn to-night?" and without waiting for an answer he took her round the waist and began to dance. I invited the other

nurse, and so for a while we danced, to the great delight of Mrs. Halina, who clapped her hands with joy. What a charming person she was to be able to take such delight in watching others enjoy themselves. But our gaiety soon attracted the attention of the prudish spinster who was in charge of the station, and from the disgusted bang with which she shut the door on such behaviour it was evident that the two nurses were in for a sound dressing-down.

But our pleasure was gone when we were challenged as to whether it was appropriate to dance at a time when thousands of people were being wounded and killed and when our country was overrun by two mortal enemies. Yet we were young, the day was not one of national mourning and we still hoped for victory. And surely it was better to dance than to give way to despair.

Anyway, the matron would not let the matter rest, but would get her own back, we were sure.

We now switched on the news. Nine o'clock was approaching, the time when all Warsaw listened with the utmost eagerness to every word Mayor Starzynski had to say. We all knew his hoarse, slow, deliberate voice. A message had been received, he said, from the B.B.C. in which they expressed Britain's admiration for Poland and her undaunted spirit. For this we felt very grateful. But he added, we also expected material help in addition to kind words of encouragement; Chamberlain had said that Britain would not leave us in the lurch.

He grew almost vehement when he came to the German lies which he took great pleasure in exposing. He sneered at their war upon women and children, on churches, hospitals and art treasures. "Warsaw," he cried, "is defended by soldiers and officers and not by the civil population. Therefore the argument which the Germans are putting forward to the world, that Warsaw has become a fortress and that the civilians must be treated like regulars, is a distortion. The messages of the German station broadcasting on the wavelength of Warsaw Two at Raszyn are also lies. Listen," he continued, "to the accent of their speaker. Is it Polish? In the whole country Hitler could not find one Pole to act as his announcer. They also lie when they say that we put

obstacles in the way of the foreign diplomats leaving Warsaw. On the contrary, every facility was given them. Their difficulties began with the German High Command, which always procrastinated and constantly refused to provide adequate transport. . . ."

The hoarse voice broke off, died away, and was succeeded by the strains of the national anthem.

*Wednesday, 20th September*

The surly old maid took her revenge sooner than I expected. "I saw you dancing so gaily with our nurses," she said with a sardonic smile, and continued, weighing every word: "Would you be equally willing to go to-day to Frascati Gardens? There are heaps of corpses there, and only a few to bury them. I am sure you will not refuse to lend a hand before they decompose completely." And she looked at me and smiled without pleasure, just waiting for me to make excuses, so that she could pounce.

However, I deprived her of that pleasure by saying that I was quite prepared to join a digging party, if she organized one, and this redeemed my character in her eyes.

Frascati Gardens used to be a private park and had recently been turned into a building estate for "development." This "development" meant, as it does in any other big city, chopping a nice big wooded space into small allotments on which the new owners build villas in a variety of unrelated styles. Part of the garden had now been turned into an emergency cemetery. To-day we had a consignment of some seventy corpses of both sexes. They were brought in wheelbarrows and carts, loaded one on top of the other like so many lumps of meat, their heads and limbs dangling and shaking as the carts jolted over the uneven ground. Some were badly mangled, others without heads, and each load was tipped unceremoniously on to the ground. The most disgusting part of the job was the identification of the victims. We had to search through the pockets of their blood-soiled coats and in the women's handbags. About two-thirds passed straight from this open-air morgue into the collective grave unidentified. Many of the bodies were those of women who had obviously been shopping and shot while they stood in the queue. They still

clasped their handbags with their money, but had no documents on them whatsoever. In one case we found the bag right inside the torn body, into which it had been thrust by the blast. So nauseating was the stench of the bodies that one of the digging party put on his gas mask, and it was a real relief when we had finished and could walk off hurriedly and sit down to recover and to forget.

The Y.M.C.A. building was quite near. This was a new building finished a few years ago, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Paul Super, an American friend of Poland and especially of the younger generation. Its wireless had just announced that Britain and France were solidly behind Poland, and all spoke with the utmost sympathy of our hecatomb. Yes, it was a real hecatomb.

I thought how lovely it must be in countries where people can still laugh, are still allowed to be happy, to enjoy the sunshine and to live. But, on the other hand, I could not help feeling that our tragic sacrifice was being made so that others might live and enjoy life. We were bleeding for those others, those other happier nations. But my sceptical self was always asking, will they ever realize that? Will they even be able to visualize the kind of ordeal through which we have had to go? And there came before my eyes the crimson letters painted with our blood on the flag of Poland: FOR OUR FREEDOM AND YOURS.

At home I had a very thorough wash and a rest. A dud shell had fallen into the house belonging to the famous Solway Soda Corporation and had landed on a bed. It lay on the soft pillows like a baby; everybody was afraid to touch it.

I now had a little time to attend to our domestic affairs. Having some share certificates and family jewellery we decided to put them in a safe deposit and I took them to the Handlowy Bank. The bank presented a strange appearance. Half of it was still performing its proper function, while the other half had been turned into a hospital and the large rooms on the ground floor were now wards filled with patients. At one end the cashiers were still paying out money and at the other were doctors performing operations. Downstairs were the vaults. At the very entrance to the safe deposit was a dressing station—charity at the gates

of wealth. Through the huge open steel door I could see the rows and rows of little steel boxes each with a little keyhole and a number to itself, which contained peoples' fortunes.

Shelling started again at noon. More destruction and more death!

Shortly after lunch I went to see the envoy of a small neutral nation. Unfortunately I cannot mention the name of that brave man nor of his brave country. He had so far been unable to get away and had to stay on in his legation at the risk of his life. I found him and his secretary sitting in the entrance hall listening to the wireless. They greeted me with a hospitable smile and I handed over my letter which the Minister promised to take with him and post to one of my friends abroad.

"When will you leave Warsaw?" I asked.

"I really do not know. We have several times been told to be ready to start, but at the last minute our departure is always postponed. The negotiations for the safe conduct of the diplomatic corps are conducted by the Nuncio, our doyen, but the German High Command always finds some excuse to delay things. The Poles have done everything to assist us, but we cannot get an answer out of the Germans. I believe, however, that we shall go to-day."

To stay on in that doomed city in a legation which had already been struck by splinters cannot have been an encouraging prospect. Shells do not distinguish between ambassadors and commoners.

In the afternoon we felt so bored staying at home that, in spite of a little shelling, we decided to have tea at the Ziemianska Café. Somehow or other, despite the siege, the management still contrived to give their guests a kind of coffee and two little buns. We had scarcely arrived when an air-raid warning was sounded and enemy planes flew overhead. Everybody ran away from the windows when the Germans began machine-gunning and the bullets rattled on the ground like peas. But, inside, no one was hit. The café was a little social centre and gossip-exchange, where people could see that some of their friends were still alive. Here I saw some of the people who passed through Viasno a fortnight ago on their way east. At one of the tables near us sat a young man who



had left Warsaw with his servant. Together they had marched, like two good comrades, sixty miles eastwards without being able to join any formation, and were now back in Warsaw.

We did not stay long in the café. Outside we heard a small group of people approaching along the street. One of them, a man, was in a hysterical state, cursing violently and making a great noise. As they came nearer I saw that he was a fireman wearing his kit and various decorations for gallantry and life saving. At first I thought he was drunk and that his wife was trying to control him, but I soon realized that he was in a state of complete despair and had lost all control of himself. He was accosting everyone that passed.

"The Town Hall is burning," he yelled, "the Castle is burning, young man! Do you understand what it means to see all these beloved buildings burning and not to be able to help? Warsaw is burning. The Germans are smashing everything we have! They . . ." but his wife prevented him from finishing. However, he got away from her and started again: "Young man, have you a wife? Have you children to avenge our misery, to take vengeance on these beasts?"

We looked pityingly at him and tried to console him, but this only enraged him the more.

"Do you understand?" he shrieked, beside himself with pain. "Have you a son who will murder the Germans and avenge our injury? If not, get hold of the first tart you see; get hold of her now, so that you have a son who will shoot when the time comes."

And he went on shouting, but his wife and some others dragged him away. He had devoted all his life to saving people's lives and property, and now the sight of so much destruction no one could stop was too much for him. He had gone out of his wits.

Part of General Bortnowski's army corps have cut their way through into Warsaw, succeeding after a series of long and bloody battles with the enemy in slipping through the ring he had thrown round the capital. The exhausted men were distributed among all the large houses in Warsaw. They were well armed and very well equipped, but had had almost no sleep for many days. Some of them were billeted in our house and how to accommodate

them was a real problem. We could not put them on the higher storeys, because they would be too exposed to the shells there, and the bottom floors were already overcrowded. The consequence was that many had to sleep on the staircase, while others lay on the parquet floor of the drawing-room in the larger flat, using their knapsacks as pillows. Most of them were too tired even to unbuckle their equipment and just fell on the floor as they were. They slept in most awkward positions. A few had enough energy left to turn on the wireless and try to follow recent events, happy to be in Warsaw and able to rest for the first time since their hectic retreat began. They had been on the move day and night. Up to the River Bzura their movements had all been planned, but from there on it had been a helter-skelter flight to the capital. They had fought like lions against a numerically superior enemy who was far better equipped with mechanized units and aeroplanes. Sometimes they had broken through the enemy ring where there seemed not the slightest chance of their doing so. They had charged—and passed. At what cost? With what losses? That is another question, but they passed.

The real slaughter began from the Bzura onward. The bridge over the river had been blown up, either by the enemy or our own sappers, before the main body was able to cross. The congestion this created was so great that there was no chance for half their number to get across. The cavalry had to wade up to their saddles in water and the infantry found a ford quite near. And all the time the Germans, who by now were established on both sides of the river, mowed them down with their deadly machine-guns and with hand grenades. Many perished and their bodies were swept away by the current. Their guns stuck in the river bed and had to be left there. An enormous amount of war material must have fallen into the hands of the Germans. They had also suffered a great deal from sniping by civilians of the German minority. There were angry scowls whenever they came to that part of the story.

Yet, in spite of all they had gone through, their spirits were excellent. Tired as they were their one thought was to get back into the line and carry on to the bitter end. They all realized how

much destruction the Germans had done and were keen to avenge it. There is something of the bulldog breed in these peasant soldiers who die hard and acquit themselves well before they die. However, we did not pester them with questions as we all felt that it would not be fair to ask them to tell their story before they had had a few hours of rest—if sleeping on the stairs can be called such.

We still have water and electricity—which also means wireless, and some of the telephones are still functioning, but there is no gas, no buses, no trams, no taxis and the newspapers do not appear very regularly and are printed with innumerable mistakes. But think of the conditions under which they are set. The technical departments of the public services are organized on a semi-military basis and their men in many instances are as brave as can be. To-day I saw two men repairing some telephone wires on our house while shells were bursting above their heads. The man on the ladder never interrupted his work, only, whenever a shell whistled ominously near, he turned his head away and pressed closer in to the wall, while the man holding the ladder crouched down, but did not let go of it.

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Warsaw is packed to-day with fresh troops. A large contingent must have arrived. In the street I saw the driver who, on 6th September, had waited outside our house for his officer; the same blue eyes, the same strong face, only now it looked tired and something of that confident air had disappeared. He, too, recognized me, and we stopped and had a chat.

They had been fighting almost continuously. He told me of the burning villages and towns through which they had passed, of the magnificent bayonet charges of our infantry, and the devastating strength of the German air force, against which they could do nothing. Our High Command never anticipated that the retreat would be so rapid, with the result that the officers only had maps to cover a small area and once they had retreated beyond it had had to move by instinct, often leading their men right into the enemy's tanks. On the whole, however, they had managed to evade the Germans, hiding in the

forests during the day. Had it not been for the German spies many lives would have been saved, but the spies were everywhere.

"Still, don't think for a moment that the Germans had not to pay dearly for their advance," added the driver. "We engaged them time and again and they left a large number of dead. I have seen plenty of bodies of German soldiers and officers—and they were as dead as door nails."

I very much wanted to hear more about the campaign in the western provinces which he had seen, but he was on duty and had to get on and I could not stop him.

There have been no night raids during the whole siege, but they are coming more frequently in the afternoon now. To-day they came over at 4.30 p.m. and dropped a large number of bombs which started fires. This raid was combined with heavy artillery fire. They were now using high explosive instead of shrapnel. The Prudential building was again hit several times, but it still defies its adversaries.

Nine o'clock found us all waiting as usual for Mayor Starzynski. No one can imagine how that wonderful man manages to find the time to be everywhere, nor how he is able to inspire everybody with such fervour as he does. Sometimes, when he was particularly busy, we had to wait a long time, and this evening the announcer said that he was now on his way to the broadcasting station. Then half-an-hour later we heard him extolling the indomitable spirit of defence, the will of the people to resist and the righteousness of our cause.

There was nothing of the orator about our mayor, nor could what he said diminish the difficulties which faced us, but as always his speech left us feeling strong enough to support another day of siege.

The war against our sleep, the harassing fire and explosions at night continue unabated. Hitler wants to break the nerve of Warsaw.

## CHAPTER VI

### NEAR THE BARRICADES

*Thursday, 21st September*

THE German six- and eight-inch guns were becoming more active every day. The nights were just as bad as the days, in fact, worse, because during darkness the explosions seem louder and more stunning and their effect seems greater. This morning I was asked to do my A.R.P. watch from one till six a.m. It was not pleasant, but by now we have developed a kind of benevolent smile to show that no duty is unpleasant enough for us. Such an attitude is the only one to make life bearable at all and keep us confident. At ten minutes to one Mr. Jozwiak, a refugee from Wierzbno now living in our house, knocked at my window as a signal that it was time for me to relieve him. I quickly slipped on two pullovers, as the night was rather chilly, took my torch and went down.

My duty was extremely simple. I had to be awake and give the alarm if anything happened. In case of fire I was to wake everybody up and call help from the neighbouring houses. Now, when shrapnel is bursting round about it is often difficult to say whether or not the house had been struck. The deafening sound is just the same and sometimes a shell exploding farther away, but in the open, appears more alarming than one whose splinters actually hit the building. But whatever their sound a night vigil is extremely trying. I sat for a while pressed to the wall near the window shaft, and came out from time to time to have a good look at our roof. Every now and then I could see a flash of light in the distance and a second or two later there came a deadly bang. The occasional duds always seemed somewhat unreal but they are more frequent than one would imagine; like a bad intention which has miscarried. The most horrifying thing of

all during such a night of bombardment is the sound of the walls of your neighbours' houses crashing and the clear realization (sometimes even exaggerated by the flight of one's imagination) of the extent of the destruction. With this comes the feeling of complete impotence in the face of that atrocious force. Sitting there waiting in the dim blue light under the harassing fire of dozens of enemy guns one feels small and valueless. The only anchor one has is the sense of duty fulfilled and the hope that some miracle will happen to free us from this nightmare. The voice of our guns barking from Saxony Garden was, in the circumstances, music. Fortunately they fired on all night.

It was quite obvious that Hitler was now pressing down the pedal and intensifying the siege. He had no time to wait until hunger and the misery of the civilian population would force the capital to hoist the white flag. He had no time to spare. He had promised his people to conquer Poland in two weeks in a "lightning" war and here we were at the end of the third week with Warsaw still holding firm, with Modlin defending itself, with Hel still in our hands and with many centres of Polish resistance unbroken. The German "wizard" had not yet achieved his purpose, but he was resolved to push on the campaign and hoped to present the astounded world with an accomplished fact and so make peace. Warsaw was in his way and he had made up his mind to erase it. The great bulk of the foreign residents having left the capital, there was now no one to bear witness to the civilized world of what he was doing here. With characteristic impudence he might broadcast that we were destroying Warsaw ourselves, just as he says that we started the war by persecuting the German minority.

Once or twice my reflections were interrupted by parties of soldiers who came asking for shelter in our house. The door was always open, but drawn close to stop the blast. This was in fact rather a useless procedure, because all the glass in the door was by now completely smashed.

My five hours seemed endless.

Finally someone else came to take my place and I went up to the flat and to bed. I was so tired that I did not wake up till

well after ten o'clock. As it happened this was my last night in that house, for, at a small family council this morning, mother, father and Zula decided to return to our house.

"It is no safer in the centre of the town and we may just as well be in our own place. There is not much virtue in leaving the house to itself. In such times as this it is much better to be together with our servants and to supervise things on the spot," said mother, quite determined to move, but she added: "If anyone prefers to stay here with Aunt Yani, do so by all means. I cannot be responsible for your lives. Being near the trenches in the suburbs may be more dangerous, perhaps, but I shall be of more use there than here with all these refugees."

That was exactly what one would expect mother to say, knowing her craving for activity. She knew that near the barricades she could at least co-operate with the soldiers, providing a place where they could get something cooked.

Half-an-hour later we were on our way home, heading towards Mokotow, towards the barricades and the southern suburb. Driving slowly in bottom gear and dodging all the dug-outs with which every street was scarred all the way southwards from St. Saviour's Circle, we eventually reached our house. The trenches here were dug one near the other and deep traps for tanks stretched right across the street. In fact our house constituted a link in the second line of defence—a pleasant prospect indeed!

However, everything was quiet and peaceful when we arrived and we found no soldiers in the trenches. The fighting was much farther south and the barricades at this point were not manned at all. They looked more like a children's playground, for dozens of boys were swinging and clambering about them, playing at air raids and hide-and-seek. Our little Anthon, who was our A.R.P. messenger, was one of the most active. He had laid a pole across the trench and made a see-saw on it with a board, at one end of which he sat while another boy sat at the other. They were playing some sort of pilot game, and Anthon was fiercely issuing instructions to his smaller colleagues, mixing to the best of his knowledge the language of skiers and pilots: "Now

with a telemark dive down and drop an incendiary bomb! Hold on to your cock-pit old boy!" But when he saw me he leaped up and darted towards us, forgetting all about his companion at the other end, whom the lightened board promptly deposited in the ditch—much to the amusement of us all.

"Good morning, Anthon, are you still working as an A.R.P. messenger?" Anthon was briskly tidying himself up and straightening his belt and scout's tie, and, still playful and very happy, he told me how lovely it was not to have to go to school. He did not mind the siege so long as there was no school and no home work to prepare.

"Have you been in your garden, sir?" he asked.

"Why, is there anything special there?"

"Oh yes all the peaches have been picked from the trees by the workmen and soldiers who were building the trenches and the ramparts and all the barbed wire from your wall has also been taken for the entanglements"—this all in one breath.

"But the peaches were quite green."

"They picked them just the same and cooked them."

Anthon suddenly became pensive.

"Two of your dogs have also been destroyed, the lovely white one I liked so much."

Bronka was just telling mother how dreadful it was having to destroy the white sheep dog, Orla, and the airedale, Pecca. Only Romeo could be saved. It was impossible to feed all the animals and there was an order that not more than one dog could be kept. There was no food. Hunger was already staring out of people's eyes.

"Poor creatures," sighed mother.

"Did you, at least, kill them humanely?"

"Mam, we could not get the man to do it. The gardener loved the dogs so much he would have nothing to do with it. I got hold of a man who destroyed the dogs for ten shillings apiece. But he could not get any poison and they would not let him shoot them. No firing is allowed by the police."

"So what did he do to them?" exclaimed Zula anxiously.

"He had to hang them both and he buried them in the air-



raid shelter. There were so many bullets flying about just then that there was no time to dig a hole for them elsewhere in the garden."

"Brute! to hang the dogs and then to bury them in our shelter which we worked so hard to have for ourselves," exploded Zula, on the point of tears.

Our dogs were not the only creatures in the city for which there was no food. High in the air we could see clusters of homeless pigeons circling round and round. At the sound of each explosion the birds spurted nervously as if they were searching for a safe place, but there was no such spot to be found. Many houses in our district were completely deserted, though on the whole the damage here was not so considerable as in other parts of the town. The inhabitants, however, evidently thought they were safer away from the vicinity of the front.

In the morning the Germans dropped thousands of leaflets calling upon the populace of Warsaw to surrender and promising to be lenient to everybody if they did. They accused our High Command of exposing the capital to bombardment and claimed that they did so for purely personal reasons. Our generals, they said, had betrayed us. We must surrender or be destroyed. But no one paid any attention to the German threats and promises. The leaflets were torn up or burned. Some people thought they were poisoned. One fell in our garden. It was printed in capital letters on thin whitey-grey newsprint. Father stuck his walking stick through it and so brought it unostentatiously to the kitchen and burned it in the cooker. We all noticed it.

The day passed relatively calmly. There was very little shooting and the streets filled with people who had emerged from their hiding places to try and buy food. They bought whatever there was to be had and at very high prices. On the whole nobody was short of money, because nearly all officials had received their salaries for three months ahead. It was the food that was lacking, for which everybody was now searching. You could see crowds of men and women, and even children, some carrying slender sacks and baskets with cabages, tomatoes, carrots, potatoes. Some lucky ones succeeded in buying a few salt herrings, but most

fortunate of all were those who obtained bread. They were immediately overwhelmed by tempting offers to resell. Few did so, though some gave part of it away free. The nearer the outskirts of the city the cheaper you could buy vegetables, for few dared go farther than Pulawska Street. But with every hundred yards nearer the centre the prices for the same commodity rose owing to the large number of willing buyers.

Those who bought their food and carried it home on their shoulders were also keen collectors of the latest news. In a beleaguered city news is nearly as precious as food, and in Warsaw it was exchanged freely in the street. The most incredible stories were told, and it required real talent to see any coherence in the tangle of conflicting reports. From time to time parties of soldiers and men from the labour corps could be seen marching along with their spades, one behind the other at a distance of a few yards like a string of geese. They were heading for the vantage points and that seemed to indicate that we were entrenching and reinforcing our positions, possibly even advancing.

No news carried with it more authority than that broadcast every day by Mayor Starzynski, whose daily talks to the populace were listened to with religious attention. In them he spoke about current events, he educated the people, he heartened them to resist, he interpreted and explained the situation and exposed the lies spread by the German wireless service. The most misleading of all these German broadcasts was that from the quasi-Polish station of Raszyn, which instilled the poison of doubt into Polish hearts.

There is something very fine about Starzynski's leadership. A few days ago he reported to the President of the Republic that Warsaw was on the alert and that she was strong and resolute, and he requested the President, wherever he might be abroad, to accept that report from his beleaguered capital.

The recent developments on our eastern frontiers were the most bewildering. The treacherous Russians stabbed us in the back and grabbed White Ruthenia and the province of Ukraine up to Lwow. It appears that they have occupied the whole of the frontier with Roumania. Some people are saying that that may

be a good thing, because it will cut the Germans off from their oil supplies. But on the whole we are under no illusion whatsoever as to the purity of the Russian intentions. Even those Ukrainians whom I have met in Warsaw do not feel at all happy about the Soviet move. To-day I met my old friend Krypczuk, the son of an Ukrainian teacher in Sambor. He was always very frank with me and made no bones about his dislike of the prospect of Russian "protection." From him I learned that the Soviet had employed an army of two million, corresponding to one hundred divisions. Obviously, said Krypczuk, they could not have wanted all that strength against Poland, which was completely occupied in fighting the Germans; in his opinion it was probably a demonstration of force in case the Germans should feel inclined to deny them their share of the swag.

What could Poland do in such circumstances? Our ambassador in Moscow, Mr. Grzybowski, presented a note of protest against this violation of our treaty of non-aggression with Russia. But what is the good nowadays of sending notes? The diplomats in the Kremlin will probably concoct some argument or other to justify themselves, but all that matters is that they had the might, whilst all that we were left with was the legal claims.

Yet, in spite of all these blows, the spirit of Warsaw was unbroken. We knew that the army was still strong and fighting the Germans. We saw our young nurses picking up the wounded under a hail of bullets, we saw our soldiers going cheerfully to take up their posts in the trenches, and last but not least, we knew that we were fighting for our freedom and our "place in the sun."

*Friday, 22nd September*

Is our sacrifice being made in vain? Shall we submit to naked force? Shall we give up the fight? After what I heard to-day at the A.R.P. post, emphatically no! I was assured quite positively by the regional warden that the British bombers are definitely expected to-morrow. There was perhaps some delay in sending them over here, but we must hold out. It is the ultimate victory which matters. So far we have been hit hard, but with help the scale will be turned.

"You know the British," said one of the wardens, "they are slow in making up their minds, but now they are definitely coming. They can easily land their planes in the fortress of Modlin where there are considerable supplies of petrol, and we shall soon see them over Warsaw."

That set the ball rolling and everybody had something pleasant to add.

"I heard that our anti-aircraft gunners have been instructed to look very carefully for the marks on the aeroplanes to make sure that they don't pepper our own allies," said someone in the room. And again we experienced that comforting wave of expectant confidence.

We are not forgotten. On the contrary effective help is on the way. Thank heavens for this better news. Now we must stick grimly to our positions, even if half of us should lose our lives.

I did not stay very long at the post. The chief instructor was very busy trying to settle the point as to whether windows should be shut or not during the bombardment. Opinion was divided. The windows in Warsaw are all double windows, the external one opening outwards and the internal one inwards. According to instructions which had been issued the outer windows had to be left slightly open, while the inside ones had to be shut. But the effect of this was not at all satisfactory and very many panes were already missing. Some people, therefore, suggested that the best way was to keep all windows wide open. It was most necessary to save whatever glass was still unbroken in view of the coming winter, and from personal observation I was of the opinion that the best way of doing that was to take the inside windows off their hinges and leave the outside ones unsnibbed, but loosely tied with string.

We had not heard for such a long time from Felix that we were beginning to feel very apprehensive, and Zula and I decided to-day to go to the Radio Corporation to see whether his name was among those reporting to their families. Several times a day names were broadcast of people who wished to notify their families that they were still alive. This extremely useful service had been

initiated a few days before, but as it was impossible to listen to all the broadcasts, we were afraid that we might have missed his name.

Our wireless is doing a splendid and invaluable work. It broadcasts instructions and news, it takes the place of the Post Office, it teaches and warns, it sustains the people in their difficulties, it does most useful work in connexion with our A.R.P., it helps members of families to find each other. It was the wireless which first gave us the thrilling news of the declaration of war by Britain and France, and now it is our only means of communication with the outside world. The offices of the Polish Radio are in Dabrowski Square. Outside, at the gate was a large letter box into which all those wishing to have their names broadcast put them. It was surrounded by people scribbling on bits of paper. One of the girls in the office obligingly gave us the "aerial letter-boxes," the four lists of names which had been read so far to-day. On one of them we found the name of Felix Polonius, but unfortunately he came from Rawa—not our brother.

Zula developed a sore foot and could not walk very fast, so it took us a long time to get home, cabs being, of course, things of the past. Near the house we met parties of soldiers and scouts taking supplies up to the front line—cases of ammunition, packets of hand grenades and green boxes with strong rope handles containing belts of cartridges for the machine-guns. From time to time we saw a field kitchen and a cartload of bread was being taken towards the barricades from the bakeries in the Citadel.

*Saturday, 23rd September*

The situation is becoming sadder every day. It is partly because hunger is growing worse and partly because the long-awaited help does not arrive. Abroad our courage calls forth admiration and—words, words, words. The U.S.A. does not appear to be willing to lift a little finger to help the Allied cause and even the neutrality laws are not repealed; they still forbid the sale of war materials to the belligerents. And in the meantime we are being shot at, our houses are being destroyed, our people killed. Last night there was a violent bombardment of the centre of the town.

To-day the number of Red Cross posts near our barricades has been increased and we now have a number of young nurses and ambulance drivers. These girls are really marvellous. The word "fear" does not exist for them. They collect the wounded soldiers practically at the very trenches whether bullets are flying or not. I have seen two of them killed. But there are fresh ones to take their place, willing, smiling and energetic. Both the example and the proximity of these brave girls are invaluable in maintaining the men's spirits. One of Aunt Yani's daughters, an ambulance driver, was wounded to-day in the hand, but fortunately not seriously. She was extremely proud of having put on the first dressing herself. We all carry with us little packets containing bandages, lint and large safety-pins.

Our telephone was still working. This morning it rang and disturbed us all with its message.

It's about Felix! Yes, about Felix. Some men from his unit are now in Warsaw, stationed in the house where we stayed last week. Felix, wounded! The soldiers could give me news of him.

"What are we to think of that?"

"Is it the preliminary to saying that the worst has happened?"

"News from our dear Felix. No time to spare, not a minute. I must find out from the men myself. Was it *our* Felix they saw?"

"Don't go now, the shelling is so intense. Wait, wait! These few minutes won't make much difference. Think of yourself for a second."

A moment later I was already on my way to Aunt Yani's. I wished for wings to take me faster over those two miles and a half which divided the two houses; I wanted to fly over the trenches, the barricades, the dugouts. Felix, Felix, I am going to hear about him. Perhaps I can help him. Perhaps every second matters.

I dashed across St. Saviour's Place, continued along Marshalkoska Street, turned towards Krucza Street. A house went into smithereens before my eyes. On! On! I was already in Bracka Street. Two more explosions. Shrapnel again! The street was

nearly deserted. A wounded woman crawled towards the pavement. I was inhuman, I did not help. Others were there. It was their duty. I felt madly determined. Nothing was going to stop me. As I entered Napoleon Square there was a deafening noise behind me. My hat was nearly blown off. Forward, forward! A few hundred yards more. A few jumps over the tangle of telephone wires trailing on the pavement; a jump over the pool of blood on the asphalt (crimson is a beautiful colour) and I was in the gateway of the house, breathless.

There were many lorries in the courtyard and soldiers, sappers, all over the lower part of the house and in the gangway. I asked the first one I met: "Did you know Lieutenant Felix Polonius?"

The man looked at me with a tired gaze, but with great kindness, and shook his head.

But I was undeterred and thought that he had probably heard of Felix's superior officers.

"Was there a Captain Tasakowski with you?"

"No."

I tried higher still, remembering the name of another officer from the squadron, the one who came to town with Felix before the war and used uncle's car.

"Did you ever come across Major Staniewicz?"

Our conversation attracted attention and some other sappers came up and grouped themselves round us.

"This gentleman is inquiring about lieutenant Polonius; do you boys know of anyone of that name?"

"Polonius? Polonius?"

"There is a fellow who would probably know," said one. "If you follow me I will take you to him."

We went into the kitchen on the first floor and I was taken up to a soldier who was cleaning his rifle.

"First-lieutenant Polonius? Ah, he was wounded when we retreated through the forest of Kampinow," said the man. My anxiety increased.

"Did you know him?"

"Oh no, but the others said he was wounded in the arm."

I felt slightly relieved and went on with my questions. Another soldier added that he was also wounded in the chest.

"Oh, that lieutenant," added a third. "He was full of shrapnel."

"Yes, yes," the others suddenly remembered, "he was left in the forest. There was no use dragging him along. He could not survive more than an hour or two."

Everything went black. Then somebody said: "The sergeant knew him quite well; why don't you ask him about the details?"

The sergeant was not there, but the boys were so willing to help me that we found him in no time.

"Felix Polonius?" sighed the sergeant. "A jolly decent man he was. But he kicked the bucket in that dreadful wood. They ambushed us and we went down like ninepins before their machine-guns when we tried to get through the forest. I am sorry for his wife."

"His wife?" I began to breathe again. "He had no wife."

"We must be speaking of two different people."

"What was his profession in civilian life?"

"He was a lawyer from Poznan."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Positive."

So it was not Felix. What a relief. I seized a telephone and dialled our number at home.

"Mother, it was not Felix." I could say no more. Our conversation was interrupted and from that moment our telephone was out of order.

The soldiers saw me coming down the stairs and asked whether I had found out what had happened. They were genuinely pleased that it was not my brother. Some of them told me how little they thought of the German infantry. Our men had fought much better. It was only that mechanized unit which had emerged so suddenly and created havoc among them. If only we had had more anti-tank guns. The aeroplanes were not dangerous in the forest, where the trees gave cover, but the tanks were a different proposition altogether. Some of the soldiers wondered where the Germans bought so many tanks from, not realizing that while we in Poland had not quite one million industrial workers the



Germans had twenty million, and that whereas our production of steel scarcely exceeded one million tons a year the Germans produced twenty. It was not our fault that we had not yet had time to develop our industry.

I set off home: poor mother was probably dying to know what I had learned about Felix.

I could see black puffs of smoke from the bursting shells falling in Nowy Swiat. They were not near enough for it to be too dangerous for me to go on, but, being tired, I went into the Swiss Café for a moment. There I had a glass of water-cocoa, but there were no more biscuits. The café was now more of a resting place than an eating house. I was hungry and turned home.

By now nearly all the little squares and gardens in the city have become burial grounds. At the corner of Pope Pius XI Street, at St. Alexander's Square, are scores of little graves, some of them, but very few, decorated with bunches of flowers. Some of the bodies were even buried in real coffins, but these were a luxury. It was even difficult to get the bodies moved. Most people do not want to come out of hiding and grave diggers are presumably not of the bravest.

In some of the squares were ownerless horses with ribs like wire cages waiting to die of starvation. There was not even enough grass to keep them alive. There were several such horses trying to graze in the little square opposite the War Ministry, and the sight of them roused the pity of some poor people who happened to be passing.

"What is the guilt of these horses," they said, "in being Polish. Why should our horses suffer more than those of other nations?"

In Mokotowska Street I passed near a sausage bar. Normally the windows would be full of luscious Cracow sausages and hot sauerkraut, but to-day all that was to be had was some thin soup at a shilling a plate. I was only too glad to have some, because I really felt exhausted and knew, besides, that they had not too much food for themselves at home. A lady, probably an old customer, pushed her way up to the manageress and asked to be

given the "thick" soup, a request which raised a chorus of indignant protests from the other customers.

My decision to feed in town was a sound one, for the lunch they had at home was very meagre, consisting of the horse meat which was now alone obtainable. Normally horse flesh was never used, even among the poorest classes, and instructions had to be given on the wireless as to the various ways of cooking it. We were advised to boil the meat first to get rid of its sweetish taste and then change the water and season it well.

We all eat very little nowadays and Zula has to be continually on guard to see that cook does not waste food. Pre-war ideas of cooking cannot be preserved. As a matter of fact, we spent most of our time in the kitchen, which we still thought was the safest place in the whole house. The womenfolk and father also slept in there, while I had the butler's room. We had moved the wireless down and it blared away practically the whole day. Suddenly at half past four this afternoon it stopped and we soon discovered that there was no current. The power station had been badly hit and much of the equipment smashed. Two more of our services gone! To-night we should be without light and no electricity meant no wireless.

But a substitute for the news bulletin arrived in the shape of our butler, Lukas. He was with an army railway unit and was stationed in the Citadel. Could there be anybody better qualified to talk about events? There was another reason why we were glad to see Lukas. He brought us a piece of smoked sausage and two tins of beef. There could scarcely be a more welcome messenger.

Lukas could not stop long because he was detailed to deliver a consignment of bread to the front line and his cart was waiting for him a few hundred yards away.

"This is rather a difficult job, because we must go right up to the barricades and then see that the bread is properly distributed among the trenches. If you would care to come and help us you would see something of the actual fighting."

An opportunity like that was not to be missed. I took some warm clothes, because Lukas warned me that if things should get

complicated we might have to stay the whole night in the cold waiting for a chance to reach the trenches.

We set off slowly, going towards the Belwederska Road which leads out of the city in the direction of Wilanow. As we approached the outskirts there were fewer and fewer people and soldiers on the road which was ploughed across by trenches. The second line of defence was manned and from there on we kept off the crown of the road and drove in the ditch. Our cart was very light and easy to manœuvre. We went as far as a white building close behind the line and put the cart up in the yard, which was the advance food depot. From there the supplies were carried in sacks to the individual trenches. Here we were told to wait. It was nearly half-past six and beginning to grow dark. While waiting we unloaded the bread as it came from the military bakery and put the loaves up in sacks of twenty so as to make them not too heavy.

Half-an-hour passed, but the officer in charge of the depot seemed unmoved. The front line trenches were about four hundred yards away. I could easily see the machine-guns with their long tapes of cartridges attached to the side. On both sides of the road were cunningly placed anti-tank guns and boxes of ammunition. An overturned tank lay in the road. In the distance we could hear the rattling of machine-guns, and several blazing buildings provided a kind of illumination. The rattling grew louder. From time to time came the sound of trench mortars. Then the crackle of hand grenades. Both sides were now intensifying their artillery fire, and this time our shells whistled.

Lukas and I sheltered in the same trench. We could see everything in the red glow of the burning houses. Suddenly the glare of a German searchlight blinded us all. Our searchlight answered almost instantaneously. It was all over in the twinkling of an eye, but there was time enough for our experienced commander to get a clear picture of the situation.

I knew now that the decisive moment was approaching. Indeed, the firing had become very intense and the rifles and machine-guns were tapping away furiously. I could see our soldiers in the trenches drawing a little nearer to one another. Then suddenly

a group of some twenty jumped out of the trench with fixed bayonets and flung themselves towards the German lines. The noise of the machine-guns was like the magnified clatter of a hundred giant typewriters. A soldier rolled over. Then another and another. But still they moved on, now in extended order. However, the Germans were not going to be forced out of their trenches; they fired fiercely and sent over showers of hand grenades. Our men also had hand grenades and flung them into the German trenches. At last the Germans were dislodged and, as they deployed, it was obvious that their force was many times superior to that of the attacking party. They could therefore avoid a bayonet charge and sniped from all sides. Two of our soldiers who were wounded fell prisoner and were taken back to the German lines.

But within five minutes our attack was renewed on a much larger scale. Our officers having learned the strength holding the German trenches hurled in every man they had. With a savage cry of "Hurrah! Hurrah!" our soldiers charged with fixed bayonets. Hand grenades burst in quick succession. The German machine-guns rattled as though they would burst, devouring one belt after another. True, many of our men fell, but a large company reached the trench and pounced on the Germans. I saw some of the Germans run towards their second line trenches, some waited to fire a last shot, but very few were prepared to receive a bayonet charge. It was well known that the Germans dislike the bayonet and fighting at close quarters. Hundreds of times soldiers had told me that when it came to a hand-to-hand fight, the Germans always gave way. To-night I saw it for myself. I saw four Germans raise their hands and two of our men, who had been taken prisoner a few moments before, grasp the nearest rifle and stab another German who was just getting out of the trench.

The little battle was over and our soldiers brought back their four prisoners. We did not occupy the trench from which the Germans had been ejected as it had no communication with the others.

It began to rain. The staccato of the machine-guns was sub-

siding, and instead of bullets large, full drops of rain fell on the soft ground, each leaving a little hole in the dry soil. The moon which had been so big an hour ago, was now covered with clouds and it was dark; quietness once more enfolded the two opposing trenches.

The officer gave a sign to his men, and picking up the sacks of bread they crept catlike toward the trenches. There must be bread for the men in them, even if the whole town had to starve—they defended it.

I did not stay long at the food depot after having seen the little encounter, but returned home under the cover of darkness. Higher up, nearer Belveder, I noticed several guns being placed in their new positions.

*Sunday, 24th September*

I had helped to distribute bread to the soldiers, but that did not mean we should get any for breakfast. In fact, we had been short of bread for several days and I wanted to take my place in the queue early. I slept in Lukas's room on the ground floor, which was safe, as it had only a small window slit and walls thick enough to withstand the enemy splinters which were the chief danger in our district. While I was dressing in the semi-darkness there spread over Praga a blood red dawn which washed the whole town with crimson—manifesting the majesty of death. Many houses were burning and brown grey smoke hung about the streets.

It was Sunday. The bread queue was longer than I had anticipated though it was only five o'clock. Between me and the bakery was a line of men and women about half a mile long. It curled along Pulawska Street, bent round into one of the side streets, came back into Pulawska Street and so reached the baker's. Standing at the end of such a queue you really do not believe that such a thing as bread exists. Selling did not begin till about six, when we started to move slowly forward. There were all sorts and kinds in the queue, poor people, rich people, some in strange garments, skiing costumes, women enveloped in shawls to keep themselves warm, others with babies in their arms. Everybody

was wearing warm woollen clothes because the early mornings were chilly and there was a prospect of a long wait. Some were quarrelling for places.

"If we can stand here, why can't you? Who are you to leave the queue and have tea at home? Do you expect that we are going to keep your place for you? Go to the end of the queue." The end meant half a mile back and probably no bread that day. A man in the queue said that the German Commander-in-Chief, General von Fritsch, had been killed in Grochow by a Polish shell. He had heard it on the wireless, announced by the Germans themselves. If it were true, it was a great success for our soldiers, but it sounded too good and the people did not believe the news.

The crowd was, indeed, a most extraordinary mixture. A little long-haired man with a grey bowler hat and an old, shabby frock coat relieved himself against the fence in front of the whole queue, much to everybody's amusement. Some of the youngsters threw things at him, but he merely turned his head and continued. He seemed to be the personification of the abnormality of our lives. At about half-past eight mother suddenly appeared to take my place. She looked lovely and so smart, more as if she was going to a café to meet her friends, than to stand in a bread queue. I was both pleased and annoyed, because I had promised myself that this morning I would get bread for the household without anybody's assistance. Besides I wanted her to have at least one night's rest.

Then came the German aeroplanes again. Like little white spots they circled above our heads and a few moments later dived down spitting fire and bullets. They dived straight in our direction and the bombs came hissing down. Some were incendiary bombs. First came the white bluish smoke of the burning thermite but this very soon darkened into a denser cloud as the fire took hold.

Having discharged their burdens the planes seemed to become nimbler and be preparing to machine-gun the queue. The crowd wavered and some people left to seek shelter in the passages of the houses. As they dropped out others immediately stepped into their places; for them bread was more valuable than safety. Parties of soldiers in the neighbouring buildings in Pulawska

Street fired from the balconies volley after volley at the raiders. I could see their aiming and concentrated faces. The German aeroplanes looped and swerved, and the thunder of their engines and the rattle of machine-guns and automatic rifles grew into a mighty roar, till they soared away steeply and sped out of reach of the defenders.

A woman collapsed at the end of the queue.

I asked mother to take cover at once, but all she did was to move far ahead of me and take a very advanced place in the queue. I was furious. She had no right to expose herself to such danger. Once again she would be ahead of me and get the bread, if there were enough and the bakery were not blown to pieces.

Those who remained in the queue pressed as close to the wall as they could. It was then that I realized what it meant to be afraid. I could feel the trembling and shaking of human bodies as the aeroplanes dived straight at us, their machine-guns spraying bullets.

Near us a timber yard had been hit by an incendiary bomb and was blazing, but most of us kept our places. At about nine o'clock the Germans thought they had done enough and the raiders whisked away across the sky. But at that moment we were told that there was no more bread to-day. I had got within a hundred yards of the gates of heaven, the bakery, and behind me stretched an endless crowd. Some did not even leave their places. They would wait patiently till the morning.

Warsaw was still holding out though it had now been bombarded for nearly two days without respite. The shells played their familiar tune to which we were all slowly growing accustomed. Only the little birds in our gardens were very uneasy and a cloud of sparrows rose each time a shell exploded nearby, and twittering, scattered in all directions. But they soon reassembled. Poor things, they did not understand that it was not they who were being shot at. Nor could they recognize our carefully kept garden (where they always found food, delicious crumbs and boiled potatoes, laid out for them). It looked so dreary now with an ugly dugout in the middle, many of the trees uprooted, and

the vine, our great pride, slowly withering away with its main stem cut by a splinter.

One of our neighbours, a wealthy banker, had turned out his saddle horses. He could no longer give them oats or hay and preferred to let them loose on the public green. Some people were asking themselves whether there was any sense in holding the city any longer and whether the long expected relief would really come. By now there were some despairing voices to be heard among the women. They thought that it was futile to resist Hitler's infernal powers. To-day, for the first time, we heard women scoffing at our army. One of them was talking to mother:

"If we haven't got the right arms, why did we dare to stand up to them?"

Mother did not like her talking like that, but she went on all the same, adding in a burst of sarcasm:

"Perhaps we are going to fight the tanks with bows and arrows like the Abyssinians."

One did not hear many remarks of that kind. On the whole the spirit of the people was still very strong. To-day as I passed a house which had been demolished by a bomb, I saw the old caretaker standing outside. All his belongings were buried under the debris. His cap was pulled down over his forehead, and his eyes blazed out from under the peak above his drooping moustache, while he continually mopped his face with a flower-printed handkerchief. His life was all bound up with that house where he had served for forty years, yet when I commiserated with him on his misfortune he said:

"It had to be that way. We could not possibly give in. We must resist even now. Everything here is gone, but the near future is ours, ours."

I am sure that most of the men felt the same. The continuous rumours about the arrival of Allied planes give us courage and stave off despair. Freedom is a magnificent flower for which no price is too high. Felix understands that well.

Our kitchen was full of people. Seeing us there our neighbours also took a fancy to it, thinking that it was safer than their own homes. All sorts of conversations were started, but they all ended



in a discussion of the strategy of the French and British. Some people voiced doubts about the possibility of the Allies breaking through the Siegfried Line. Their progress seemed so slow. This was our second day without the wireless. Our world, which had already been so greatly limited, had become infinitely smaller. Our circle of knowledge extended now not much farther than a few hundred yards from the house.

There were many fires in the suburbs. The fire brigade now only attended to the biggest and most important buildings. Even then they were kept at it day and night without proper food, without sleep. But what was their work worth? It was a drop in the ocean of fire. Local fires had to be fought locally, if at all. Many houses and factories burned themselves out without anybody lifting a finger. Often you saw the solitary figure of the owner standing by and trying to rescue some of his belongings. But that was all. Helpless they watched their property disappear in the smoke. Whenever it was possible little parties were improvised to fight the fires or at least isolate the burning building.

This afternoon several fires broke out close to our house. The shelling was not very intense in our district, so I went out to see how bad they were and noticed that the architect's wooden hut beside a newly constructed house was ablaze. In itself the damage would not have been great, but the hut adjoined a whole row of houses in construction, still enveloped in their timber scaffolding and beside them lay stacks of boards and planks. The baulks of the hut were burning and crackling wildly and its resinous rafters were blazing like a torch. The tops of the poles and the boards became black and their edges fretted like a scallop. One by one they fell and continued burning on the ground.

The wind was from the north, carrying the fire towards the neighbouring buildings and some of the window frames had already caught. I approached, feeling the warm, tarry and smoky breeze irritating my eyes. There was no one there. Alone I could do nothing, so I called for help. Two men appeared with a hatchet and an axe. It was impossible to extinguish the fire, but we might yet prevent the flames from spreading. We called for more help and people appeared, though some of them were

entirely useless. The main thing was to get all the wood out of reach of the flames.

A pile of boards was already burning at one end and the flames were slowly spreading towards the centre. More dangerous still, tongues of fire were licking the storeroom where hundreds of window frames and rough doors were stacked. Our first effort was there. We worked without respite, sweat falling in big drops from our sooty foreheads. We battered with strong poles at the burning window frames, and eventually managed to dislodge them from the walls and they fell dully on the ground, much to our relief. Now we were sure that from inside the fire had been brought under control, though the direction of the wind still made the heap of blazing boards a danger to the whole house.

We now concentrated all our efforts on localizing the fire. A certain number of planks had to be sacrificed, as there were so many of them about that we could not dream of isolating the fire at its centre. We had to estimate at which point to begin removing the boards. Another heap of planks began to rise at a safe distance as we dragged them from the endangered area. But it was very hard work, and there were, besides, not enough of us. Some women appeared on the scene with buckets of water, which, when poured on the flames, produced a plaintive sizzle and white steamy smoke. There were now about seven of us working and about another six women bringing the buckets of water.

The night was gradually falling and in the light of the blaze we all looked red like workers in a foundry. It was such strenuous work that, after several hours of it, all our muscles ached and our shirts were wet, but we could not slacken till the two piles of boards were completely separated. Then, fortunately, the wind changed.

The shelling was as continuous as ever, but now the explosions seemed to be coming nearer. Indeed one or two were very close and loud. We did not, however, pay much attention to their noise and proceeded with our work. Only those who paused for a moment's rest preferred to take it under cover of the building. The women were still bringing buckets of water, which they got

from two sources, one a well, which served some other new buildings, and the other the laundry of a block of flats.

All of a sudden the women bringing water from the laundry gave a shriek. They had seen the body of a schoolboy with the top of his head shorn off by a splinter along the line of the forehead. He had been on the staircase just at the moment the shell exploded.

After this a number of our helpers preferred to go home. They had not realized that there was so much danger, but were now made horribly aware of it. Luckily, we had managed by this time to bring the fire under control and it was now more a matter of supervising it than of actually removing planks or throwing sand into the flames. Indeed, we were too tired to do anything more, and sat down at a certain distance from the ashes, which were still glowing and very hot. Though the night was cold, we felt extremely warm and comfortable. It was like sitting beside a huge camp fire. Shells exploded from time to time, breaking the silence. Now that our fire had died down we could see some much bigger ones in various parts of the town. The morning will probably be pink again. An empty feeling in my stomach reminded me that I hadn't eaten anything for I don't know how many hours, and then about nine o'clock I suddenly realized that I had not warned them at home that I should be away so long.

I knocked at the kitchen window which was blacked-out. Zula opened it and immediately began to scold me and call me names.

"We have been worrying our heads off. What has happened to you? Aren't you a fool? Mother has been crying. To leave us like that during such a shelling and not to mention where you were going."

"But I am back now." I tried to placate her.

"He is back mother; he is all right; he's a fool!" I dashed to the kitchen to kiss mother's hands.

"Darling mother, why did you worry? Poor mother."

She was crying and bitterly reproaching me: "Why do you give us such frights? It is so dangerous, so terribly dangerous,"

reiterated mother and cried with joy as she stroked my untidy hair. Those tears of mother's I shall never forget.

*Monday, 25th September*

I have great difficulty in finding each day appropriate superlatives to describe the intensity of the siege. To say merely that "to-day it was still worse than yesterday" does not convey very much and I know that when one day I re-read what I have written I shall be unable to find a true estimate of the whole siege. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that to-day it has been much worse than anything we have had so far. The same kind of artillery shelling, the same high explosive and incendiary bombs, but all on a much larger scale. The only language which could carry conviction would be that of figures, but I doubt whether our tragedy will ever be measured that way. One can never get those statistics one really wants. Too many bodies have perished in the fires, just burned; too many people have been buried in the public squares unidentified; too many lovely things have disappeared in the smoke. The rate of destruction has been so great that it is impossible to record the losses. Probably they will never be accounted for, except in very general and vague terms. Everything that we possess, including life, of course, is being annihilated. The only record will be written in the souls of the survivors.

The Germans must have got wind of the artillery which had been placed in a large unbuilt area near a paper factory in our district. They have been shelling that field for some time. A number of shells have exploded over our house and I saw our neighbour's roof struck, and the chimney become a heap of bricks.

Early in the morning, when it was still dark, Bronka came in a great fright into my room and shook me awake saying that the Germans had set fire to the lawn. Going to the window I saw on the grass a number of brightly burning flares like balls of Bengal fire. I could not make out why they should drop so many flares, and I thought at first that they were incendiary bombs.

A whole domestic party (including Romeo who proved a great nuisance) went out with spades and shovels to cover them with sand and earth. We were, however, too late, for the lights, of

which there were some thirty, had already begun to die down. It only took us a very short time to put them out. The only trace they left was a kind of silvery metallic powder on the grass and pieces of metal studded with holes in the shape of a Davy lamp.

We could not make out why the flares had been dropped, and thought that perhaps an atrocious raid on a hitherto unknown scale was about to begin. However, an officer explained that they were very likely used for taking photographs from the air. He did not think that they would use them to illuminate objectives because, so far, they had abstained from night bombing. Owing to our almost complete lack of aeroplanes they could fly as much as they liked during the day, unmolested except for occasional artillery fire. While we were putting out the flares I noticed a fire raging very near us in the poorer part of Belwederska Road. Having already acquired a taste for fire-fighting I picked up my spade and ran off in the direction of the blaze as fast as my aching muscles allowed.

An incendiary bomb had struck a corner shop, which was all built of wood and burning like a furnace. It poured out an enormous amount of smoke which rose into the air where it mingled higher up with a cloud of smoke carried by the wind from Warsaw, where a large number of houses were burning this morning. It was hopeless to try to save the little shop. The only thing we could do was to remove some of the goods. It belonged to a Jewish woman who was away at the time, and the only person left was an assistant, a relation of hers. She had completely lost her head and we had to salvage whatever we thought of any value. Among other things we discovered some hundred pounds of soap in long cakes, the familiar "Revolver" brand. Behind the shop was a little flat in which we found the usual kind of furniture: a couple of beds, which we dismantled and brought out; a wash-stand; a wardrobe full of old clothes and shoes; a few jars of jams and jellies; some aspidistras in pots, and a collection of kitchen utensils. Under the bed was a large number of old shoes and boots, most of them very decrepit. Poor people never part with their things, only such calamities as fires or deaths can get rid of them. In the shop were a number of boxes of

cigarette papers and tubes; a few chairs; some pickled herrings; one or two jars of jam; about three or four pounds of sugar, and a very small sack of flour.

The salvage party consisted of a soldier, a boy belonging to the Civic Guard, and myself. There were many more people watching, but they would not help and I noticed that as we rescued the things the women were barefacedly stealing them under the pretext of rearranging them. They concealed anything that took their fancy under their skirts, disappeared for a moment, and then came back for more. A fire was apparently an excellent opportunity for looting—big fire, big looting. As matters stood, we were saving things just for those hags to steal. One was in league with a soldier who took some of the booty to her flat.

"Everything for the army," moralized the dishonest woman. "Take it boy, take it," she encouraged him.

"Fancy," said another thief, helping herself to the jars of jam, "the dirty Yidd refused to sell us sugar and salt the other day, saying she had none, and all the time she had a shop full of things. The dirty profiteer!"

Strange how people find it necessary to provide themselves with a moral excuse for immorality. It was impossible that this shop could have belonged to a profiteer. It was rather a kingdom of poverty, where there was very, very little of anything, even for the owners.

But the birds of prey were there and something had to be done, else everything that might be saved from the flames would be instantly distributed among these poor, but very dishonest people. This was not a case of the rich being robbed by the poor, but of the poor robbing the poor. Being only a casual helper I had as good as no authority. My only title to interfere was that I had helped to save whatever was saved and that I did not take anything for myself.

However, there was no time to lose. It was much more important to go on getting things out before the roof collapsed. The inside of the shop was already full of smoke and some of the people kept giving us false alarms that the outer walls were already falling. Again and again we darted into the little house and came

out with another thing saved. I tried the method, which had worked so well at Viasno, of promising the soldiers some reward out of the salvage if they would look after it and keep the others away. It did not work so well here because, as I soon saw, they had no confidence in me and thought I would let them down afterwards. At Viasno I was the commanding officer, here I was nobody. But it did reduce the rate at which things disappeared. We were now rescuing more than people stole, and that left a net balance after all.

Another ally came to our assistance—the German shells. We heard an ominous whistle and a moment later an explosion. The hyenas wavered in the midst of their plundering. Their precious lives were in danger. Some regretfully made off home at once, their greedy desires unsatisfied. How nice it would have been to have appropriated that useful teapot, or that clock (the dial was only slightly damaged), not to mention the bed linen and the blankets—they weren't darned very much. But not now, later. It was a little too dangerous just now. Better to go. *Thieving and bravery do not go together.*

We had to hurry now because most of the building was already in flames. We managed to make one last dive into the smoky room in which we looked like phantoms as we moved about, talking all the time. "If only we could remove that sideboard," said the soldier. "It contains some useful things the family could do with." Suddenly we saw somebody else come into the room through the smoke and flames. He was a young boy of sixteen and with his help we lifted the sideboard and got it partly out.

"Only don't block the exit, because then we are finished if any of the blazing girders fall inside. Let's keep the entrance clear."

As we struggled with the furniture a little kitten ran madly across the room. It was terrified. We tried to chase it out, but it mewed and mewed and hid somewhere. We turned again to the sideboard and had just got it out into the open when another shell exploded about two hundred yards away, sending stones and earth in all directions and leaving quite a considerable crater.

The fire was now attacking the western wall as well as the southern and we decided that there was little more that we could

do. Then a prolonged mew came from inside the burning house. The little kitten was still there. The boy risked another plunge, and just as he disappeared inside a panting red-faced woman came bumping along like a barrel, panting and shrieking that her boy was burned alive.

"My sonny! sonny boy! Where are you?" she yelled.

"Please do take care of that lady," I shouted to the others.

"She does not know what she's doing."

"So, I don't know what I am doing? You bastard, you bloodhound! How dare you?"

Without waiting for any explanation she seized hold of a big stick and charged at me, trying to whack me on the head. Before I knew how, I found myself involved in a battle with a woman—from every point of view a very delicate matter. However, my head had to be protected. The old woman was by no means joking, and I had lost the sympathy of most of the crowd, as I had openly condemned their plundering, so there was no time to spare. I ducked and picking up my spade succeeded in parrying the blows, each of which was intended to be mortal.

Meanwhile, "sonny boy," who had not managed to catch the kitten, jumped out of the house and, seeing me embroiled with his mother, thought that I was attacking her with my spade and prepared to join battle. All were now united against me. Worse still, during one of the assaults I lost my glasses. Half-blinded and with only a spade I had to fight a mother and her infuriated son in the presence of a hostile crowd.

I had succeeded so far in parrying all mother's blows, but one from the son now reached its mark. Luckily the soldier, who had been helping us to get the things out of the house, intervened. He took up his rifle and threatened to shoot them if they didn't stop, and that put an end to hostilities.

It did not take me long to explain to the woman what the position really was.

"Well, why didn't you say so?" was her only comment. As is customary in Poland, I kissed her hand to show her and the others that my respect for her remained unimpaired. This gesture won me many adherents; people now began to believe that I



really had no ulterior motive in saving the property. Even my glasses were found for me and my sight restored. Nearby was a row of strongly built houses and we had just taken some of the goods into the passage when a violent bombardment started. The shells were bursting very near and from the passage we could see large bits of masonry chipped off the walls by the splinters, and the sparks flying as the shrapnel grazed the stones in the yard. We were fairly safe in the passage, but could not leave it, as the shells exploding in the gardens in front of us sent a shower of iron fragments falling on to the sidewalk and on the pavement. Somewhere there we knew were our guns. The Germans were certainly after them. We all crouched together in the passage and I took great pains to keep the people away from the entrance. Now my advice was followed and I could perceive a complete change in the attitude towards me. In fact, some of them were perfectly sweet and presented me with a small paper bag of bread crusts, and when I tried to share them with the others they all refused, seeing that I was very hungry.

"You eat it. We are not hungry; we had a good feed this morning."

This was my reward for saving their property. But soon they were even more grateful to me. It happened this way. The shells were still falling thickly when suddenly someone caught sight of bluish smoke coming from the roof of a large turpentine store.

"A thermite bomb!"

Splinters were flying all over the place, but time was precious.

"Sand and water!"

"There's no water. Something has happened to the supply."

"Well, a ladder, on the roof!"

In spite of the shelling two men ventured on to the roof.

"Quickly, an axe!"

We cut a hole in the roof as quick as we could, and saw the bluish, artificial-looking flame, which gave out a metallic smell reminiscent of electricity.

"Here it is! Here!"

"Put the sand here! Another bucket!"

"Good, that's doing it. Good! And another!"

"Excellent, now it will die down of itself."

I returned to my stale crusts. They tasted fine, considering how hungry I was. At any rate they filled one's stomach, and I was glad enough of them, because the intense bombardment which was going on all round us and farther in town prevented me from leaving the house for half the day. It was simply impossible to go. The shells were falling so thickly that I should never have reached home across that field which the German heavy guns had made their target. Waiting there I realized how terribly Warsaw must be suffering, because even from where we were we could hear the sound of the bursting shells and bombs.

In this danger even those wicked old harridans who had just been robbing their neighbour now sat quiet, suddenly grown meek and humble. Some of them continuously made the sign of the cross, touching their foreheads and chests. Our guns answered from time to time, but their voices were much too weak. Were we getting short of ammunition? The very thought was a nightmare. If we were, there was no means of getting any, except perhaps from the fortress of Modlin, with which it was believed contact was still maintained. Modlin defended itself just as bravely as Warsaw. We were told that that line must be held at all costs, so that when the Allied aeroplanes arrived they could find a convenient landing ground. In Warsaw we had no petrol or aerodromes left, while Modlin had both.

The sky was gradually becoming overcast with denser and denser fog. But it was not fog; it was smoke from the burning capital blown south on the wind. Never was the Warsaw sky covered with so thick a pall. It turned the mid-day sun into a mere red disk, and all the time we could only feel that above us was the bright sky.

In the afternoon the shells began falling farther away, and once again we could hear their swishing sound passing overhead. The Germans probably thought they had destroyed enough here and that it was time to turn their attention elsewhere. The people sheltering in the passage began to breathe again and the cousin of the owner of the burned shop woke from her torpor. In gratitude for having saved her belongings I was offered, and

accepted, a dozen cakes of soap. In the circumstances, a royal present.

I set off home along Belwederska Street. On the main road I saw a man driving six beautiful black cows, surely of pedigree stock. They walked slowly with all the majesty of their race, but the flames of the many fires frightened them. Where were they being driven, those beautiful animals; to the slaughter-house, or would it still be possible to feed them? I looked north towards Warsaw. It was one enormous sea of fire. I knew the answer to my question.

In front of me was a huge blaze. The factory which this morning had sheltered our artillery was on fire. I had seen it catch alight during the bombardment when I was sitting in that passage. The owner was away, and who would risk his life for such a trifle as a burning factory? At such moments life is dearer, especially to those who had spent years working in it for inadequate wages.

This time I returned like a hero, well able to face mother and Zula. My trophies were just as good as theirs. A large packet of soap was something worth having. Cook locked it carefully in the larder to prevent me from squandering it among the neighbours of whom there was always a crowd in the kitchen. Cook is not herself. Since the bombardment began she has burned everything without regard for the preciousness of every little crumb.

To-day's new problem is the water. Since eleven o'clock there has been no running water. The little trickle, which was still coming from the tap this morning when I left the house, has dried up completely. The Germans have entirely destroyed the water-works. This, of course, is quite a rational part of their plan of destruction. After all if they wanted to burn the town, the obvious thing was to see that it had no water for fighting fires before they dropped their incendiary bombs. Destruction is at its zenith. "Mercy" has no place in the vocabulary of the German High Command. There is no room for it in the theory of "total" warfare. Whatever the moral values involved, the Germans will proceed regardless of any scruples and strangely enough, nobody

expects them to. I haven't been in town to-day, but from the incessant noise of the shelling and exploding bombs I am sure that the damage done must be enormous. It will probably take several days to clear the dead and wounded and to make the streets passable.

We could hear large numbers of aeroplanes flying in the darkened sky. They were all German bombers. We could not see them, except occasionally when they dived through the smoky blanket to drop more bombs. Once or twice I felt convinced that some of the planes they used were our light training R.W.D.s which they must have captured at some aerodrome. It was aggravating to think that the enemy was now using our own equipment against us and saving the wear and tear on his own.

In the evening our kitchen was still full of neighbours, for though their houses were within two minutes' walk, they were too scared to leave. The kitchen was lit by a solitary thin candle. We have to economize even on candles. Mr. Kotenchowski has just remarked that this has been such a "lightning" war, that there has been no time to compose even one new song for the troops, not even a poem. Our army, which is so fond of singing, has to do without.

*Tuesday, 26th September*

I feel that I am growing abnormal. When the guns are firing I feel quite assured and light of heart, but I am afraid of the silence. When, as sometimes happens at night, everything is quiet for several hours, the most horrible thoughts come into my head. The firing is the outward sign, the concrete proof of our resistance. It shows that we are defending our capital. Fortunately the inferences I have drawn from the silence have so far proved unfounded. One thing, however, which is very worrying, is the thinness of our fire compared with that of the Germans. That is a bad sign. True, I never felt very sure of the outcome of this struggle, but one had to trust that our commander, General Rummel, had good reasons for putting up such a stout resistance.

After a fairly quiet night sharp shelling began again about eight o'clock. I had the feeling that our soldiers had started attacking and moving forward. It was rumoured that Mayor

Starzynski had issued a proclamation to the populace of Warsaw calling for further defence. There were supposed to be very important reasons for that. After the Gehenna of yesterday the decision to resist further was perhaps a harbinger of good news.

The Germans concentrated their fire more and more on Mokotow, and we found ourselves in the middle of an artillery duel. This morning splinters fell inside our dining-room, cutting off the legs of one of the chairs, and piercing holes in the pictures on the walls, one a lovely study of the snow-clad Tatra mountains by the nineteenth-century Polish master, Falat. We found the chair lying on the floor without its legs like a wounded thing. The room was full of smoke and I had to open the remaining windows to let it out. Splinters are treacherous things. Often you cannot make out how they even got in. This damage was the first we had had to the house, if you do not count the splinter which lodged in one of the pictures on the wall in Felix's room.

But there was not much sense in standing in the dining-room staring at the wreckage, because the shelling was very intensive. I glanced through the window. In the distance the factory which I had seen catch fire yesterday was still burning with a low warm flame. All of a sudden, from behind that factory where some of our guns were placed, a red fire-ball shot high into the air looking like a big drop of molten metal. It was what I suspected—a signal, because almost immediately the shells began to concentrate on that area. Again we all had to take refuge in the kitchen, while outside detonation followed detonation. They were all very close. Would our house escape destruction? Already nearly all the other houses had been struck.

Then at half-past ten there was a tremendous explosion. Was it in our house? I ran to the hall. Unfortunately, yes. I dashed into father's study where we kept our best pictures and furniture. Splinters of wood and bits of picture-frames were strewn all over the floor of the hall. A second later I saw it all. In a cloud of dust the large bronze chandelier crashed down on to father's desk. The whole ceiling was raked with bullets and the plaster stripped off. The covers of the French eighteenth-century sofa and armchairs were torn off and looked like dirty rags, all soiled

and powdered with dust. The windows had been shot away. Several of the pictures were torn and destroyed. The library was just a mess. On the floor lay bits of cups and vases, slivers of cut-glass, heads broken from the busts of our best sculptures—in short, the collection of a lifetime had been destroyed in a second.

I removed some of the pictures from the walls. Many looked like sieves; some were really not even worth moving, they had gone back to the state of some undefinable raw material, and over everything was dust, dust, and broken fragments. In 1915, when I was a boy, my parents took me to the battlefield of Raszyn west of Warsaw, which had been the scene of the German offensive during the Great War. I remember that from one ruined church we took some bits of wooden roses and flowers which had been chipped off the altar by splinters. I called them "war trophies," and kept them as a souvenir, never expecting that I should witness anything of the kind again. Now the box containing my "trophies" was smashed to smithereens.

Experience is the best master. Seeing what had happened I decided to remove some of the best pictures and miniatures into the cellar, as with this continuous shelling there was very likely to be more damage done. After an inspection of the cellar I also decided to move a little food and clothing down there in case the bombardment in our district should continue indefinitely.

This question of using cellars as shelters is a most controversial one. By now I divided everybody into "cellarites" and "anti-cellarites," those who find comfort and safety in them, and those who are so afraid of being buried by the walls collapsing on them that they will do all sorts of mad things rather than take the risk of being unable to get out. Whether this predilection is because the "cellarites" are more akin to the cave man than the others, I do not know, but I personally, in contrast to the other members of the family, am rather partial to cellars. Fortunately little Anthon also showed a liking for the shelter, and helped me.

In the midst of all this an infantry officer in field uniform and helmet hurried into the hall and asked to be taken to the roof, where he wanted to put a nest of machine-guns and an observation post. Soon afterwards a number of soldiers arrived with

cases of ammunition and green hand grenades shaped like large eggs. Our house was evidently to be part of a new defence line.

The soldiers were in a great hurry. They demanded the way to the garden, selected positions for their observers and riflemen and asked for all the sacks we had. We produced a few which were soon filled with sand and earth and used to close the gaps between the balustrades on our terrace. Some of them began to pull down part of the stone wall dividing us from our neighbours, for it was essential to have communication between the villas, while others with picks and iron bars were knocking a hole in the back garden wall to ensure their line of retreat. I must admit that it is a queer sort of feeling helping to destroy the walls of your own garden, but what did it all matter when we felt that the enemy was near, so very near and that our little bastion might help to stop him, perhaps for a few minutes, perhaps for a few hours, perhaps even force him to retreat?

The preliminary measures were quickly effected and a good defence line constructed along the front of the villas and other buildings. The positions were connected through the gardens, and camouflaged with branches and plants. That was perhaps more painful than anything else. Mother had taken so much trouble with this lovely garden of ours. She had consulted all her friends as to how to manure this plant or that shrub; how best to cover it for winter. Now, in a moment, it had all been devastated and only bare stems were left. The soldiers' bayonets and knives had made an end of our garden.

The line was now formed and manned, ready for action in case the first line was broken. In every house there were small detachments of reserves. Many of these houses in Mokotow were deserted and there was no one to do anything for the men, so we were glad to be able to make their tea and cook whatever food they had.

Our front rooms now looked rather like an armoury, or an arsenal on a small scale. Hand grenades were laid out in rows on the dining-room table and the men were busy screwing in the fuse-caps to have them ready when the attack should start.

The soldiers had their own bread with them and only wanted

some tea. Bronka and cook, under mother's guidance, soon provided what was needed, and we lent some of our saucepans and plates and kitchen spoons to others who came in from the neighbouring houses. They brought a pail of water with them. God knows where from, but when boiled it would be all right. One of our neighbours had a tiny fish pond in which he used to keep goldfish. The water was normally very clean, and probably that was the source of their supply.

Some of the soldiers shook their heads when they saw the destruction done by the shrapnel in the house. They really felt sympathetic and expressed their horror at the extent to which the Germans had smashed Warsaw. Naturally they were not sentimental about it. Lack of sleep and all that they had seen had inoculated them against sentimentality, but in their own way they did show their feelings. They also, whenever they could, gave their own bread rations to the civilians, now that the Germans had bombed most of the bakeries.

The evening passed fairly quietly. The Germans were held at the first line, so the soldiers in our house were able to snatch an hour's sleep. Some of them were willing to have a chat, and I soon discovered that a little drink of an alcoholic nature would be appreciated, especially as the evening promised to be chilly. I alluded to a bottle of *slivovic* brandy, which I had brought back from my holiday. *Slivovic* is a very nice drink made from plums and has a strength superior to ordinary vodka. I promised to let the soldiers have half the bottle if they would undertake to dilute it with water. They did. But how many do you imagine kept their part of the bargain. None! I saw the bottle pass from hand to hand after each had had a good sip. It went by rank, starting with the sergeant, then to the other N.C.O.s, and ended with the privates; but there wasn't much left for them. Unfortunately I had only one bottle.

*Wednesday, 27th September*

Before going to Lukas's room to take a nap in my clothes I asked the sergeant to pay their debt for the *slivovic* by waking me up should there be any danger. Anthon, who was also spend-



ing the night with us, was accommodated on the sofa in the hall, which was put against the strongest wall and well away from the window. He had a blanket and put one of the rugs on the top to keep himself warm. Everything was quiet in the house. Outside single shots could be heard from time to time, but otherwise all was still.

At three o'clock Anthon came quietly into the little room and woke me from a light sleep.

"They are going!"

"Going! Why?" and I got quickly to my feet. Indeed the soldiers were leaving and taking the machine-guns and the hand grenades off the dining-room table with them. I asked the first soldier I met: "Why are you leaving?"

"We have been ordered to leave. We don't know anything more. The lieutenant said we were to hurry."

There were now no soldiers in the house, and we went back to bed rather puzzled as to what would follow. We had slept for about another two hours when there was a knocking at the door. Cook lay shaking in her bed mortally afraid and repeating her Litanies one after the other. She was sure that this was the Germans. Then Anthon came into the kitchen as gay as usual, in spite of having had only a few hours' sleep, and said: "Some airmen want accommodation immediately."

Cook sighed with relief and tucked herself up again. Anthon and I went out to see the airmen. They were from a squadron which had reached Warsaw, and as there were no aeroplanes left they were doing ordinary duty. Think of that! Those men on whose training hundreds of pounds had been spent had now to do the work of ordinary riflemen. They called themselves "infantrified airmen" and spoke scornfully of their new job. But all the same, they had to obey orders and these were to serve on the barricades.

They took possession of a little flat which was empty in our house and had an entrance of its own. Again our garden was filled and the positions manned. Large machine-guns were placed at each of the barricades, and all was ready to repulse any surprise attack.

A few of the airmen stayed in the house to cook some porridge, and as usual came to the kitchen to borrow our large pans. They had hardly been there half an hour when the artillery started again. Anthon and I got up to have a look. The shells were falling so close that the bursting shrapnel was tearing cobbles out of the pavement. This made things very difficult for the men laying telephone wires from the front lines back towards the centre of the town. Crawling close to the walls and hiding in passages, they covered every yard at the risk of their lives. I was watching a party of three with a large spool when a shell exploded a few yards away. They all fell flat on their faces and I wondered how many would rise again. Fortunately I saw them all get up a minute later and go on with their work. Next shell! and again the same. But there must, alas, always be one shell which reaches its mark.

Hell is let loose over our district. Explosion follows explosion, so that we cannot distinguish one from another. It is just one prolonged noise. First, we see the earth, or part of the walls flying up into the air, next comes the explosion and then the splinters, slicing off parts of the buildings and chipping the plaster and bricks.

This is now the front line. Our airmen will be in action at any moment. I imagined that at the end of the green in front of our windows we shall see field-grey uniforms, and possibly the tanks will open fire. Just a row of houses and the few trees at the other end of the green to hide them now. From just behind that tree is where the first German is most likely to emerge. It will be easy to get him on the head of the sights. Probably they will appear like little bluish miniatures. How many of them? Oh, they will be held here. But why don't they come? The shooting seems to be dying down.

## CHAPTER VII

### PARADISE LOST

"If the Germans came, Bronka, what would you do?" said Zula, both wishing to tease the maid and find some consolation for her own thoughts.

"Oh, just nothing," answered Bronka.

"But aren't you afraid of the Germans?"

"Yes, miss, but if some of them are handsome boys I shouldn't be afraid of them. They can't do anything to me. I haven't any money or property to lose," she added, tossing her pretty head.

"Yes, but they could kill you, or do you some wrong."

"I should run away."

"She talks such tommy rot, miss," interposed cook.

Since about eight o'clock the shooting had stopped altogether and I took the opportunity to have a wash, for as the bathroom window looked on to the lawn, it was too risky to stay in it even a short time, and I had not had a chance to shave for several days. It was amazing the amount of dust which had stuck to me during so short a time.

This continued quiet was extraordinary.

"There's no firing," everybody repeated in surprise, the kind of surprise which is ready to accept both the pleasant and the most unpleasant.

"They seem to have got tired of shooting," remarked mother, casting her eyes about undecided as to which job to start first, but determined to use the valuable interval to the best advantage.

I had been wanting to write to a friend in London and decided to make use of the lull to dash for the Estonian Legation and see if they would send my letter for me. As I should pass the Nunciature it would be worth while to look in and try if they could help me instead.

I had not been in town for some days and wondered how it would look now. In Mokotow we were considered to be in the front line and the fighting might begin again at any moment. Everybody had an errand for me to do, including the cook, who had lost touch with her son and wanted me to ask every soldier I saw whether he had not perhaps heard of him.

Having passed the two barricades near the house I proceeded along the railway line, for the main street was shot to pieces and the tramlines had been removed in places to build obstacles for the tanks. The town was looking ever so much worse than a few days ago, and then we had thought that to smash it more would have been impossible. I turned into Narbuta Street, which was covered with bricks and stones from the walls. Yet the signs of destruction were increasing—telephone poles barring the way, tangles of wires, roofs torn off, bricks all over the street. The nearer I got to the centre the worse everything became, but my first real shock came in Union Square. In the middle of the pavement lay a dead horse and round it was a pushing crowd of women with knives in their hands jostling to get at the carcass and carve off a piece of the flesh. The skin on the rump was open and each helped herself. It was like a nightmare slaughter-house. There was a man digging on the green quite near and he called sarcastically to the hungry witches:

"Couldn't you help me a bit with my digging, ladies, before you begin cutting yourselves your juicy rumpsteak."

But the women's eyes were glittering and their one thought was to fight their way to the carcass:

"Shut up you old fool! Mind your own business!"

The horse disappeared before my eyes, till only the bones and the bowels were left and they looked like a pile of carnival balloons, but greyish-yellow and spotted with blood. I was obviously not intended to be a butcher.

A few hundred yards farther down the street on the other side of Union Square, a shell had exploded, severing a water pipe, and a little pool had formed in the crater. People spat in it. The water was dirty and mixed with the Warsaw clay. Then

a man came up and began to draw some in a pail. Others followed him with various kinds of containers, jugs, bottles, cans.

"That water is too dirty for washing."

"That's all right, we want it for drinking."

"But you can't drink such water, don't you see it is mud?"

"You must be crazy! Don't you know that we are without water?"

"Do at least strain it through a cloth and boil it before you drink it."

"Shut up, idiot. We don't want your stupid advice." "He wants me to boil the water when I have had nothing to drink for two days and am nearly dry inside!"

This last remark came to me as I walked towards the barricade closing the square. I made my way towards the Nunciature, which was situated quite near in a lovely little chateau set in a garden. Now the middle part of the roof was shattered and probably other damage had been done as well. I rang the bell, forgetting that as there was no current no one could hear me. After waiting a few moments I walked into the garden which was now a litter of papers and bits of brick. In the large white kitchen the maid told me that only one of the fathers, the secretary, was still there. She ushered me into a passage near the kitchen where, on a hard camp bed, sat a young priest reading his breviary. His face was ascetic and concentrated, but very kind. With a pale ghost of a smile he asked me what I wanted, and when I explained about my letter said:

"I am extremely sorry. You have come too late. The Italian priests have gone; they left with the diplomatic corps a few days ago. I am the only one left and I shall not go. My duty is here."

When I asked him what course he thought events would take, he answered: "Everything is in the hands of God. Without his will even the smallest beetle cannot sustain any injury. Our lot has been written in the eternal books and we must accept it calmly and without murmuring."

In the adjoining kitchen the cook was preparing some macaroni. There was nothing doing here. So I went out back into the street again and continued on my way to the Estonian Legation.

I was aghast to see what the Germans had done to Warsaw. The lofty steeples of the neo-Gothic St. Saviour's Church had been hit. One still supported the iron girders of the roof, which now looked like the backbone of a fish. The other was truncated and leaned ominously sideways. It might all collapse at any moment. On the other side of Marszalkowska Street the Ministry of War, which occupied the whole length of the street, was burned out. Blackened and gutted was this home of Marshal Pilsudski's army and our country's pride.

Again those wheel-barrows full of corpses looking in the morning sun like piles of wax dummies. There were many fresh graves in the squares and as I drew near the centre of the town the destruction was worse than ever. Obviously the last bombardment had been directed against this part. Many houses were burned out, some were still smoking with a last flicker of flame among the beams and posts. Everybody walked in the middle of the street to avoid the debris and the bricks falling from the walls. The large houses on either side of Mokotowska Street had all fallen victim to incendiary bombs and the Estonian Legation, when I arrived there, was only a heap of ashes with nothing but the wall and the staircase remaining. A military four-wheeled cart full of furniture and cases was standing just outside in the midst of the debris. They were moving the legation's belongings saved from fire, so the soldiers told me.

"The staff have gone to 53 Marszalkowska Street—one of the buildings which have not suffered from the bombardment."

I turned my steps there. On the way I passed the German embassy. No more police outside. Nor were they needed. The German shells had taken care of that. Their embassy was very badly smashed. Inside it was just a pile of bricks. Outside was a repetition of the scene I had just witnessed with the dead horse, but here the carcasses were some days old and the people were doing their best to cut themselves something from the neck. A Civic Guardsman who was directing the traffic ordered the crowd to the other side of the street because the roof above them seemed on the point of falling. Many took no notice or only increased their hurry. They had no time to waste.

I had to knock at least ten minutes at the new flat of the Estonian Legation before I was allowed in. The door was opened by a suspicious gentleman in an overcoat with slanting Mongolian eyes which pierced me through.

"It is only to ask you to take a letter for me, which you could post in any neutral country."

The man was relieved. They had a great treasure in the legation, a sack of flour and some other provisions, and were afraid to let anybody know.

"This gentleman wants a letter taken," said the little man through the door to someone in the other room, and a voice answered: "Tell him it will be all right."

My problem was solved. The letter would be taken and would perhaps reach its destination.

As the guns were still ominously silent I thought I would go and visit Aunt Yani and call on my way on other members of the family whom I had not seen for some time. As I walked along I tried to reason out the causes for this extraordinary silence, but my attention was continually being distracted by the sights that met my eyes. There were so many familiar buildings, shops, restaurants, picture houses in ruins. I have tried to recall what I saw so as to have as accurate a picture as possible. Where Marszalkowska Street and the Boulevard of Jerusalem meet, there was a long line of stretcher-bearers. Obviously there had been many casualties in this district. You saw men and women stop and heard their tale of the horrors of the last two days.

"You wait," said a man, "till you have passed Sienna and Zielna Streets. Then you will see what they have done." Another said: "I wanted to cry when I came out of the shelter. I never thought it possible."

Near the kerb lay something of indefinite shape covered with a military great-coat and beside it stood a woman who every now and again interrupted her prayers to say: "Please, walk carefully here. Don't step on the body. He was killed here."

But people paid scant attention and scampered nervously on their way. It will take a long time to recover all the bodies

and the wounded from the ruins of the houses. I saw at least forty in half an hour.

I turned into Złota Street, and here the confusion was even worse. The whole street was strewn with books from what had once been a large lending library. Everybody trampled on them and cars passed over them as they lay, mixed with dirt and dung, in piles, and occasionally people would stop to turn one or two over and carry some away. Most of those left were foreign books. I saw one or two men pick up a volume and then, finding it was German, throw it back angrily, saying: "We do not want their poison here. They will pay us for all that they have done to Warsaw."

I picked out three French novels and went on. A few yards farther down the street I felt my feet catch in something strange and rustling. I thought for a moment that I had got entangled in some wires, but on looking down I saw thousands and thousands of yards of film covering the street. I added a few inches of pictures to my collection and turned quickly into Zielna Street. Here the caretakers from the buildings were doing their best under the direction of the Civic Guard to clear a passage for traffic through all the rubble. Having nothing to do in their own houses, which in most cases had ceased to exist, they worked with a kind of passion clearing the street, collecting the larger lumps and beams into one big heap. The work helped them not to realize what had happened around them and to keep them from giving way to despair. Speed was needed, too, for the firing might begin again at any time.

I passed the enormous building of Cedergrén Telephones, Ltd. Everything round it was destroyed and fire was finishing off what little the shells had left undone. Inside each house was a fire, like an encaged devil, licking up everything it could find and turning it into smoke and ash. There was a great blaze in the distance. It could only be the Stock Exchange. A vast fire glowing and smoking against the background of the Saxony Gardens. It seemed to have started quite recently, for it was still mainly of an orange colour, unlike these old fires here which were already amber-purple, and dimmed with smoke.



There was Aunt Mary's house and, wonderful to relate, it was untouched in the midst of all those fires. I did not at first believe that the whole house could have escaped unscathed, but when I entered the courtyard I saw that actually very little, if any, damage had been done. Many were sheltering there; and as I was inquiring for the porter a window, most of whose panes were still intact, suddenly opened and a familiar voice called out: "Alexander! Alexander! We are here. How marvellous that you have come."

It was my cousin's wife, Cecily. Her small flat was crowded. There were the old consul, the two little girls, their mother and half a dozen other people I did not know. They all looked very pale and exhausted.

"We have heard that the house in which your Aunt Yani lives was burned on Monday, but we do not know whether it is true."

Was it true? Half my family lived there and the collection of pictures grandfather left was in the flat. What had happened?

There was still no firing and this persistent silence seemed so strange that everybody wondered what the reason for it could be.

"There is obviously some kind of armistice," the consul said. "You come from the outskirts: what do things look like there?"

"They say that we are holding out in the suburbs," someone said. "Except that in Mokotow we have obviously had to close in the lines a little. There was a rumour yesterday that the Fort there was surrounded."

"That is possible," I said, "because yesterday we had the front line in our garden; to-day, however, things appear ever so much better. Besides, before the Germans can reach the centre they have to force a deep system of barricades."

"In town people are saying that we have come to terms with the Bolsheviks and that they are now working hand in glove with our army," said one of the ladies.

I never believed in the good intentions of the Bolsheviks, but not wishing to depress her, said nothing. Certainly the realization that there was an armistice of some kind made me extremely apprehensive.

"I shall have to be going," said I.

I set off in the direction of Aunt Yani's house, anxious to find out how they all were there. Everywhere the same scenes of damage, the same stretcher parties, fires and broken walls. I passed the square near the Italian Embassy. The Italian flag was still hanging from the balcony and a large sign had been painted on the roof, but this had not been much of a protection, for like the other neutral embassies, this friendly building bore the traces of shells.

Most of the shops, where they had survived the bombardment, were empty and without their plate-glass windows. Some had boards instead. Kredytowa Street had several houses burned or destroyed. I was hurrying and my eyes were too occupied with such details as hanging roofs, falling balconies, leaning walls and trailing wires to take notice of all the damage done. Only occasionally could I stop for a moment to take note of which familiar landmarks had vanished.

I knew that Malachowski Square had suffered badly, for it was here that the Evangelic Church had been burned some time ago, but it looked ten times worse than I had imagined. The Credit Bank was shot to pieces, possibly even burned. I couldn't say. It is so difficult to tell when you just pass by without stopping to look. The outside walls may still be standing, while inside fire has destroyed everything. The big shops in the building where Ambassador Raczyński had his house were burned; the streets adjoining it ruined. Czackiego Street was in parts burned to the ground.

As I went along I betted with myself that Aunt Yani's house had escaped serious damage. I could already see it in the distance.

"Well, the façade looks clean and white. It can't be burned, and doesn't look as if a bomb had hit it."

And I walked on.

"Rather lucky. Looks all right."

Alas, that was only an illusion. The external walls, it was true, were still standing, but they hid disaster. The house had been completely gutted by fire. You could go into the courtyard, but the inside was like ruins of an old castle, and when you looked up there was the sky.

"Where are all my people, Aunt Yani, her children, granny and the others?"

But there was no one to ask. Just charred rubbish and the outer walls. I walked across the courtyards. In the back garden were two men filling in the grave of some of the soldiers who had perished in the house. I picked up a forage cap which had obviously belonged to one of them and placed it on the grave, where the sterile city earth covered it.

One of the men stopped and straightened himself.

"Prokopoff?" I said.

"Yes, sir."

"Don't you remember me from Viasno, where you worked at the manor?"

"Mr. Polonius. Mr. Alexander. God bless you!" said the man with a strong Russian accent.

Prokopoff had been with us since 1920. He was a Russian and one of those taken prisoner during the war with the Bolsheviks, when prisoners were distributed among the various estates. He liked staying with us so much that he settled down in Poland and married a Viasno woman.

"Tell me, Prokopoff, what happened to my Aunt Yani and the old lady? Did they escape? Are they alive?"

Old Prokopoff looked sullen, shifted his spade from one hand to the other, spat twice, and said:

"So many people lost their lives in the panic which followed the bomb."

"But what about Aunt Yani?"

"Oh, she was very good, she jumped from the ground floor window and got a ladder. The elderly lady came down by it and so did the young misses. None of the family lost their lives. They left in the middle of the bombardment in the young lady's car, the Red Cross nurse. You will find them all at her flat."

"Was anybody in the house hurt?"

"Apart from the soldiers, several people were burned alive. On the second floor the doctor's wife and little girl were killed when the ceiling collapsed on them.

Although Aunt Yani's daughter's flat was miles away in the

western suburbs I set off there at once in my self-constituted capacity of family liaison officer. They might be in need of something and mother would certainly want to know all about them. If I did not collect the news she would probably go out herself.

The first part of my report was simple enough. There was nothing left of the big house and Aunt Yani's and granny's flats. Nothing. I had looked twice up the shaft and scrutinized the blackened walls, but there were no pictures there, and in the debris I could see nothing.

It was now two o'clock and the streets were gradually filling as people came out into the sunshine like lizards from their holes and hiding places. I had walked for about ten minutes when I saw a stream of people crossing the street and begin to search for something in the ashes of one of the burned houses. I looked. Yes, there had been a greengrocer's shop here. It was completely burned out but by poking about you might find baked potatoes or apples among the ashes. So the hungry crowd hunted and any such precious find was ravenously eaten.

In Holycross Street there were still some shops with goods displayed in their windows and these were being systematically pillaged by the women. The Civic Guard was doing its best to stop this looting and I saw some young policemen dragging a woman out of a shop backwards on her buttocks, while she grasped an armful of things. But the law was now non-existent. Some of the houses in Nowy Swiat had escaped total destruction, but most had been hit. Enormous piles of wall closed the entrance to Chmielna Street, where the large houses were half-demolished or showed huge gaping holes. I crossed the Boulevard of Jerusalem. The granite building of the Bank of National Development with the bas reliefs over its main entrance, was pitted all over, but not in ruins. There were two holes in the cupola of the Basilica of St. Alexander, one made by masons before the war to repair the church, the other by shells to destroy it.

I had been walking for about three-quarters of an hour when I reached the little square in front of the Polytechnic School. This district was less damaged, in spite of its close proximity to the old racing field and private aerodrome. Here the defences

started again. The end of Sniadeckich Street was closed by a deep trench and there were machine-guns posted behind shelters made of street cobbles and stones, while an officer regulated what little traffic there was. It was possible to continue farther west by making a detour during which you had to walk on boards which concealed what were probably mined tank traps. A howitzer and a field gun were concealed so ingeniously in green branches that I never noticed them till I was nearly past.

From this point onwards those going west always stopped to ask those coming in towards the city: "Can one pass this way? How far are the Germans?"

And the people smiled and answered reassuringly: "Oh, yes, you can pass. It's all right. All firing is suspended. You can proceed quite safely as far as the next barricade. When you get there ask your way again."

Some people were even more generous with their encouragement: "It's the last day of the bombardment. The Germans are so upset by the death of Von Fritsch, that no general wants to risk his skin to come to Warsaw."

"The French have broken through the Siegfried Line, and the Boches will have to withdraw their troops from Poland immediately. The dogs are caught now between two fires and will need every battalion they have got for the western front."

"Now you understand why they have initiated this armistice."

Once more the familiar topic, that balm for our suffering—help from our Allies. Immediately several people knew for certain that "British aeroplanes were already on the way and that some had landed to-day in Modlin."

One could spend hours listening to this kind of talk, but I had to get on. The road to the next barricades was clear and beyond them I passed near the Marshal Pilsudski Hospital, which from the outside appeared quite intact. Stretching along its wall was an enormous queue of people armed with the oddest variety of vessels patiently waiting for water. Some had ordinary pails, others jugs or large metal wash-tubs which it took two of them to carry, pans, two-handled pots, kettles, pitchers, even little cisterns—in fact, anything and everything. Two soldiers had been posted

there to keep order as people murmured and protested whenever anybody went in with a large vessel, because it took a longer time to fill. But the silence of the guns had a heartening effect on the people who, though hungry and exhausted, felt a little happier, forgetting, or perhaps not yet realizing, the magnitude of their misery.

Past the hospital and its long queue, I encountered a herd of starving horses deluding themselves into thinking that there was some grass on the green. There was another barricade to be negotiated before I reached the Water Board Station. Approaching a barricade forces one to lift one's eyes from the obstacles in one's immediate path, and the sight that met mine here was one of desolation beyond description begging anything I had seen so far.

Here had been the charming Garden City of Staszyc, the first settlement of small houses built in Warsaw after the war of 1914-1918. But now it was not here any longer. The pretty modern villas and houses, whose owners had probably just paid off their mortgages, were now each reduced to a solitary chimney and a heap of smoking ruins. A little wider at the bottom, the stack rose up and ended in a chimney pot; round that column of brick was nothing but sooty broken masonry and charred pieces of timber.

The only way of crossing the barricade was through a tramcar fixed in a narrow passage between two deep trenches. You entered through one end on one side of the trench and came out through the other end on to the other side. All traffic had to pass that way. The filters and works of the Water Supply Board lay in front of me forming a large patch of green covering a score of acres between two large thoroughfares. Constructed years ago by an English engineer, they had been bombed and destroyed in a few days and could supply no water to the city for weeks to come. The Germans had used very heavy bombs to damage it, one of which had exploded just outside in Filtrowa Street, leaving a crater thirty feet deep across the whole width of the street, so that you had to worm your way past along the wall of the house.

In the distance I could see the outlines of St. James's Church

and the large blocks of flats in President Narutowicz' Square. On one side was the main road leading from Warsaw to the aerodrome of Okęcie, where the Germans had already been established for some time. Although this part was nearer the front line it had not been damaged so badly. In the ruins of two large houses a man rummaged the rubbish with a poker. In his hand he held a piece of an ornate looking-glass frame, but discarded it to look for something more useful.

I picked it up and seeing the hall marks said to him: "Don't throw it away, take it. It is silver and valuable. You may be able to sell it."

"Sell it?" He looked at me and grabbed the frame. "But where shall I be able to sell it? My children want food. The Germans won't allow me to sell this silver. They will want it themselves."

The word "Germans" sounded sullen. Yes, the Germans, the invaders, they might march in at any moment. This alarming silence might after all be the tragic prelude to surrender, to the loss of everything, to the collapse of our cause. Suddenly I realized that this could happen, saw the new eventuality in all its brutal clarity for the first time. Miracles do not happen easily.

For a moment everything looked black. The most treasured of our possessions, freedom, was perhaps lost. That freedom which we took for granted and loved, which, like good health, we do not worry about as long as we have it, but miss so much when it has gone. The freedom of our national existence, our own Polish standards and our own moral and æsthetic principles, our own language, our own modes of life no longer seemed secure.

I did not lose hope, but the thought depressed me and I moved on. Walking required too much attention to allow one to remain absorbed in one's thoughts. There was a deep trench to be crossed somehow before I could get to the street where Aunt Yani and grandmother were now living. I could hear the detached clicks of machine-gun fire, and the sound came as a relief. Perhaps, after all, the firing would be resumed. Possibly we were taking the initiative. There was sporadic shooting in the distance somewhere at the end of Grojecka Street and bullets were flying. Best

to walk quickly. The street was nearly deserted and not wishing to find myself inadvertently falling into the hands of the Germans, I turned into a side alley. Here it was not so quiet and the sight of the soldiers laughing gaily and chatting with the civilians brought my courage back to me. They stood about in groups and offered each other sweets. Everybody had packets of sweets and hundreds of toffee and chocolate papers were flying about the street, circling on the pavement and slithering up the walls. The stock of a sweet factory on Ochota, which until now had escaped notice, had been distributed among the soldiers who, in turn, shared it with the people. It was fantastic. Here were all these people who had not had any decent food for days and had even been short of water, standing there munching with both hands full of rich sweets stuffed with marzipan, and grenadine and pistachio.

One of the soldiers was holding a banknote which he wanted to change. Five of them had been paid together by the paymaster and they now wished to divide it up. I happened to have enough change on me to help them in their difficulty, and in return I too received a handful of bonbons. This was just outside the house which was the aim of my walk. I rushed upstairs. On the staircase sat two soldiers fixing a telephone wire and holding a portable receiver. As I learned later the house was the headquarters of the local defence sector.

I found the whole family assembled in the small flat, still looking shaken by all they had gone through, but settling down happily. They had not saved anything from their flats except a fur coat apiece and the family jewellery; their flight from the flames had been too sudden. Aunt Yani told me they could have rescued much more, and possibly even extinguished the fire had it not been for the incessant shooting and bursting of shells overhead and the panic which ensued when the occupants of the house realized that the attic was burning. I was given a vivid description of their escape through the empty streets of Warsaw in the midst of bursting bombs and shells and collapsing masonry. Now they were left with little but their clothes and what was to be found in this little flat here, which by some happy accident had escaped



damage. The fine picture of roses by the master Wyczolkowski, a wedding present from Aunt Yani, which hung over the sofa, was the only family picture left.

But in spite of all their troubles Aunt Yani and her husband were active and in fact in excellent spirits. When I asked her whether they needed anything, she answered that they had everything and were thankful for it all. Just like her.

The uncle, usually a sceptical and morose man, seemed rather animated and surprised me by asking what I thought of the bright bit of news.

"Good news? Let's hear it."

"He hasn't heard anything," exclaimed Aunt Yani. "You had better tell him yourself," she said turning to her husband whose sullen eyes livened. He grunted twice and said:

"The Bolsheviks are sending a powerful army to help us. Marshal Smigly-Rydz came to terms with them and is leading them at the head of our army. The Germans were unable to withstand their onslaught and are retreating in haste. They have also had a crushing defeat on the western front where the French and British forces are pouring into the Ruhr. We have had most reliable information straight from the soldiers. If you don't believe it, ask the one handling the telephone on the staircase what excellent news has been coming in. Negotiations are going on at the present moment between our command and the Germans about evacuating Poland immediately. The only point which remains to be settled is the amount of the reparations which they will have to pay us for all the damage done." And, turning to granny, he added:

"You needn't worry about the house; they will have to pay in cash for all the damage. It will all be reconstructed."

That sounded too good, yet he seemed to believe it and hitherto I had always thought him a confirmed sceptic. I went to speak to the soldier on the staircase and he indeed repeated the same story: Marshal Smigly-Rydz, on a white horse, was leading a triumphant army before which the Germans were retreating in haste. The soldiers faces were gay and there was a feeling of relief and exultation in the air.

The sudden change in our fortunes did not appear to me to be plausible, yet the news came from the soldiers. Who knows? I thought. It all sounded extremely strange, but optimism is contagious and I returned home in a different mood.

The road along which I had come was now closed and I had to go back through Slupecka Street. An obliging tramwayman going in my direction showed me how to get round the trenches. We began talking about food. He objected to eating horses.

"It isn't Christian to eat horses."

"Why?"

"They are noble animals and we should not eat them. A pig is a different matter—we can all eat a lovely sausage or a cut of pork; but we haven't seen that for a long time."

He, too, was very hopeful but unfortunately our ways parted. His talk of sausages reminded me of the urgent hollowness which I felt inside. The soldiers' sweets had only increased my hunger.

My way led me through Polna Street where there was not a house that had not been hit several times and the frontages were all pitted with ghastly holes. One had as many as eight large holes on different floors. I had my three French books under my arm, the film I had collected in the street in my pocket, and I now picked up a large piece of wood which had been part of a fence. I was sure it would be welcome in our kitchen, where we were short of firewood, as the gardener had not come during the last few days. He was probably hiding somewhere, or maybe something worse had happened to him.

Outside the fire-station on the other side of the street was a small group of soldiers. Suddenly I heard a loud shriek and a voice shouting at me to move, and one of the soldiers waved his arms violently at me. I stepped aside and the moment I had done so a heavy balcony fell and broke in pieces with great noise just behind me, scattering dust and masonry. The man had saved my life. I crossed over and shook hands with him and thanked him for the warning.

Near the old station of the narrow gauge railway to Wilanow I found a great number of flattened machine-gun bullets and put a handful in my pocket to add to my collection of war souvenirs,

and also a nice bit of the shrapnel with which Polna Street was strewn. Hurrying along I found myself in Pulawska Street, in the heart of Mokotow suburb, and after crossing a number of trenches I arrived home.

I found father standing in the sun chatting fiercely with a neighbour. What a sight! Nobody hiding, everybody out, everybody interested in the events of the day. The silver heads of father and his friend moved rhythmically as they told each other their views. Seeing me, father's eyes smiled.

"Hallo! Here he is! All the day he's been away. Now tell us what you've seen."

"What do people say about the armistice?" asked our neighbour, when I had briefly related my adventures.

"All sorts of funny things are being said. Apparently Hitler asked for peace and is ready to withdraw his troops from Poland. They say that the Russians sent a hundred divisions against them."

"The Russians?" sneered father. "They are probably afraid of their own shadows. We know what to expect of the Russians. I have heard the same report from Mrs. Kicka who lives in the house opposite. She says that our army and the Russians are hand in glove; she may be interested to hear what you say."

He went to Mrs. Kicka's window, called, and her stout bust appeared leaning exuberantly over the window sill.

"I am not surprised," said she, arranging her black hair and sending a few bits of broken window pane tumbling from the sill as she moved. "It will interest you gentlemen that the Soviet Ambassador is the only member of the diplomatic corps who still remains in Warsaw. That I know for certain from an officer who belongs to the command of the defence of the capital."

"How do you interpret that?" asked father much interested. He thought Mrs. Kicka a very clear-headed woman.

"Obviously he is needed here to act as a link between the Soviet Government and ourselves. You are too rash in condemning the Russians."

I was too hungry to listen any longer and went to the kitchen where the cook had left me a piece of horse flesh and some potatoes, which disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. There

was also tea with sugar; what else could one desire? Mother and Zula, learning that I had returned, came in from the garden—the shabby dry garden where they had been trying to save at least the best plants and shrubs. Father had already told her about the fire, but she took the news calmly, glad that all the family had escaped injury.

The womenfolk did not share our relief. They thought that things would take a tragic turn at any moment. They talked continually about the Germans. Cook was quite unable to settle down, while even Bronka, who was always so cocksure, did not seem so certain of herself as usual.

The great silence which had lasted since the morning induced neighbours to go visiting. Some wanted to know whether their friends had had anything for lunch and if so what; others whether such and such a family had had any losses; what was demolished, who was wounded and missing, but above all how to interpret the extraordinary silence. Mrs. Kicka's boy came in. He wanted to see the odds and ends which I had found to-day, as he collected what he called "trophies" himself. He asked me to come with him to collect bits of the grenades which had exploded near our house and show him the place where we had extinguished the German fireball on Monday.

As we walked along the boy suddenly called out: "Look, look, what a colossal aeroplane! It's flying so low. Is it a British bomber?" and he started jubilating and dancing on the green.

Indeed in the western sky shimmered the body of an enormous passenger aeroplane, a big air liner, such as is used in times of peace. No reports from our guns, no familiar puffs of bursting shrapnel round it! An obvious inference was that it was carrying German negotiators to Warsaw, or was bringing ours back from the German-occupied territory. How could that be? What could they discuss? Who was in the plane?

"It does not seem to me to be a military machine. Looks more like a passenger liner."

The boy was not satisfied and kept on asking questions.

"We needn't guess," said I, seeing some of the ground staff from the barricades. "We can ask the soldiers; they will be able

to tell us exactly. They surely know more about aeroplane types than I."

It appeared that it was a German aeroplane and probably bringing a number of officers. But what for? What for? I felt very apprehensive. Could anything good be expected?

My family had grown so accustomed to living in the kitchen that now, though the day had been so quiet, they still received their guests there and kept all the mattresses on the floor. When I returned I found Zula in conversation with Mr. Turkusfeld, a factory owner from Czeszochowa, who had escaped before the town was occupied. He was a Jew and desperately afraid of the Germans. Zula tried to comfort him a little, but she did not really know how. He was pale and had not shaved for some time, and there were dark pockets of worry and sleeplessness under his eyes. He gesticulated wildly as he talked.

"It will be dreadful if they apply the Nürnberg Laws in Warsaw. What am I going to do then?"

Zula did not know much about the Nürnberg Laws, but she said: "Oh, I do not think that they will apply them here, where one-third of the population is Jewish."

This easy answer annoyed Mr. Turkusfeld and he insisted more emphatically that the anti-Semitic laws would be enforced.

"I wonder whether they will confiscate all Jewish money and compel us to live in the ghetto?"

But Zula had too many fears of her own to have much sympathy for his anxiety.

"I am more concerned," said she, "with whether they are going to execute us in the market squares. Will they also execute young girls?"

"How do you expect me to know? One can expect anything from the new generation of Nazis," answered Mr. Turkusfeld, gloomy as Jeremiah.

It was time to black-out the kitchen and Bronka hung the tarpaulin over the window. Her interest was divided between what was being said about the Germans and the airmen occupying the basement who had invited her to sample their cooking.

The conversation was continued for a while in the candlelight.

Then some airmen came to borrow a saucepan. Mr. Turkusfeld had gone and we spent the rest of the evening with the soldiers who were coming and going all the time.

This was the first normal night we had had, and we all undressed and went to sleep in our night garments. That in itself seemed all topsy-turvy. It was so quiet; so unnaturally quiet. In the distance a dog was howling.

*Thursday, 28th September*

From the moment it became light I could hear the throb of engines. The aeroplanes were humming very low backwards and forwards like angry bees. Were they our planes? That seemed most unlikely. What were they? I went on to the terrace where a number of airmen were watching them as they flew in formations of three. You could easily see the crosses painted on their wings.

"What planes are those?" I asked.

"They are German," answered two or three simultaneously.

"Are you sure that they are not ours, or Soviet machines?"

"Positive, quite positive."

There was no firing from any of our guns and the German planes circled over the city with complete impunity. That was ominous, removing, as it were, a curtain that hung between my mind and the terrible thing I suspected and feared the most. We had surrendered! Warsaw, our last stronghold, had handed the keys to the enemy.

All our beautiful castles in the air, all our speculations about support from Russia or help from our allies had vanished. I realized that as far as Warsaw was concerned the fighting was over. Some new order of things was coming, the nature of which I did not at the moment comprehend. Like someone who sees that his future has suddenly taken a dangerous turn, I was more interested in ascertaining the truth, in confirming my fears, than in finding the nearest way out. Was it possible that after all that effort it should end like this, in utter defeat? But my doubts were relentlessly confirmed over and over again by the roar of the German machines as they passed overhead as evenly as if

they were on manœuvres. Then corroboration came a few hours later, at eight o'clock.

Anthon arrived earlier than usual this morning. In his khaki shirt and shorts and his square scout hat he trotted after me like a faithful dog.

"You see, Anthon, something very tragic will probably happen soon. The Germans will take the capital and will stay here for some time."

He looked at me, knowing that I was talking about important things, but not understanding their full implication.

"The Germans will have spies everywhere. You will have to beware of everything you say; and very careful about everything you do. You follow me?"

He nodded.

"You learned at school about the unhappy days when Poland was partitioned amongst her enemies and suppressed. Times like that are coming again. You understand?"

His "yes" sounded very quiet.

"You were born free, in a free Poland, but for the time being we shall be divided again between the Germans and the Russians, and our enemies will rule the country. There will be no Polish flag, no Polish army, no Polish Government. Very often we shall have to work for the country secretly; not a word must be whispered."

As I spoke to Anthon I noticed that numbers of the airmen had collected in the garden and outside. They looked pale and downcast. Some were weeping. Their officer had just told them the worst news a soldier can hear. They all had to go to the Citadel, there to deposit their arms and receive their last order from a Polish officer—the order to disperse. The officer had pulled his cap low over his forehead and was as white as paper.

There was great activity in all the houses as the soldiers prepared to leave, and it was only now that I realized what a tremendous number of cases of ammunition for the machine-guns there were hidden all over the place. The removal of the machine-guns from their emplacements was like a funeral. These were

the guns for which collections had been made all over the country, to which even the school children and unemployed had contributed.

For the men, parting with their rifles and equipment was like saying goodbye to someone much beloved. Young Anthon seemed to sense what was in the minds of these men. He helped them, he talked to them, and tried to be in ten places at once. Two soldiers brought a large case of hand grenades, oval things shaped like eggs and grooved like scallops, and tilted them into the barricade and furiously started to cover them with earth, saying: "We don't want our arms to fall into the hands of the enemy. They may still be needed when we rise against the invaders."

They worked hurriedly for they had to be at their place of assembly by a certain time. One of the airmen, feeling his impotence and the hopelessness of the situation, gave vent to his fury and despair by throwing a hand grenade in the direction of the deserted green. There was a loud explosion, but no damage done. It was his farewell to arms, the last convulsive kick of the body when the heart has already stopped beating. The soldier's eyes gazed at the place where the grenade had exploded, but his mind was far away. He was as though spell-bound. His eyes were vague and you could look right into them and there was nothing there at all. He was shattered, disarmed.

Father was in the same state, broken and despairing. He could not understand how so much injustice was possible. The explosion had brought him out into the garden where the soldiers were removing the last of the machine-guns and boxes of ammunition.

"We haven't done any wrong," said father. "During the twenty years of our independent existence we have built up our state, we have worked hard, reconstructed our industry, developed our agriculture, built a system of schools, raised the standard of life of the masses—and now all that will go by the board."

I tried to comfort him by saying that these evils would pass and the day come again when Polish children would sing freely and go to Polish schools.

"Yes," said father, "perhaps in your lifetime, but not in mine. I shall not see it again. So many years spent in collecting those



lovely pictures. Now most are smashed and the rest will be taken and dispersed to the four corners of the earth."

I tried to console him, but that was useless because he was perfectly calm and reasonable.

The German aeroplanes were ceaselessly overhead like overseers watching to see that the sweated labourers did not relax their muscles. Groups of soldiers struggled along the road carrying their equipment and occasionally trying to smash the vital parts. I saw some banging the barrels of their machine-guns with heavy bars to render them unserviceable.

The airmen who had occupied our garden were just going. They gathered into a cluster and, carrying their equipment, took the road towards the centre of the town. A few who had been staying in the house came to say good-bye.

"You must feel foul," I said to one young pilot. "I feel foul myself."

"Why?" said the boy, a personification of activity and daring. "I am going to escape to Roumania or somewhere else; the fight is not yet over. I can fight for Poland abroad; French and British machines need pilots too. I can fight there."

By Jove, that boy had pluck! He did not give in easily. Even now he was thinking how he could resume the fight for his cause.

I found in my pocket a little gold coin which I used to carry with me. It was a ten zloty piece issued many years ago and actually worth much more. I gave it to him.

"You take it. When you are in a foreign country you may need it. I am sorry I cannot give you more, but this is worth three dollars and you will make good use of it."

He looked at the coin as if he thought that it was not money that was needed at this time, and I saw that he wanted something else.

"Go on, what can I do for you?"

"Could you spare me a pair of civilian trousers and a coat?" he said, obviously having already thought out all the details of his scheme.

"Of course!"

A few minutes later he rejoined the others carrying a little parcel of clothes, and we and our servants were left alone in the house.

I did not yet quite grasp the feasibility of escape, and was not at all sure what the position was. Were there still any centres of Polish resistance? Or had the whole thing collapsed with the surrender of the capital? My presentiment told me that it had. In that case how on earth was it possible to break through the German cordon! Surely that would be impracticable.

The news of the surrender was known to the whole town. Outside our house dozens of people were coming and removing the wooden boards and poles which had been used for tank obstacles. At least the poor people would have some firewood for a few days. The wood from the barricades disappeared with amazing rapidity. Now it was nobody's property and could be taken, at any rate till the Germans entered the town. What would happen then, no one knew.

Bronka was not interested in wood. She had noticed that the airmen had left some gruel and lard cooking in a large pan and dashed to the flat to save it, bringing it back stealthily to the kitchen, where cook immediately appropriated it. There was now enough food to feed the whole household for some days, so there was no need to open the few remaining tins which were still carefully preserved in the cellar, where we had also put the pictures.

But what were the terms of the surrender? What was the position? Did the war in the west still go on, or had we been deserted and left to our fate? To all these questions there was no answer and we were entirely without news. There was no use in turning to the wireless, for with the current cut off it was silent.

What arrangement will the Germans and the Bolsheviks make? Have the Bolsheviks also absorbed the Baltic States? What orders will the Germans issue for the inhabitants of Warsaw? One can only guess. Certainly the possession of arms will be punishable by death. Requisitions will follow, as we know that the Germans are themselves short of most commodities. We shall be the under-

dogs in a state where everything is scarce. So much we knew, but that was not enough and I set off towards the city to see what more I could find out. One thing was certain, there would be no more shells now.

I walked along the same ruined streets as yesterday. The external appearance of the town had not altered, but the appearance of the people had. Two things struck me. First, the men looked resigned, some were even in tears, and, secondly, owing to the cessation of fire, people moved about more freely and searched for food, shelter and water. Gradually they filled the suburbs, where even yesterday they had not dared to go.

In Union Square I met some old acquaintances of ours, Mr. and Mrs. Kilejski. She looked much older than at the beginning of the war. They were standing in the middle of the square quarrelling. She wanted to go back to their flat in the suburb, while he protested that there they might fall into the hands of the Germans.

"We have some food in the pantry which we could use," she screamed.

He called her names and obstinately stuck to his point.

"I would rather starve than go to the Germans."

Quarrels like theirs were going on everywhere. The women were more realistic and wanted to save whatever was still to be saved, while the men wanted to avoid seeing the Germans for as long as possible. They wanted to delay things, to delude themselves that they were still in their own city. In Marszalkowska Street I came across Dr. Tankowski, a lawyer whom I had known well when we were both at the University.

"How do you do Ladislaus. We meet in no very gay circumstances."

"No," said he, and his fat indolent face grinned.

"What are we going to do when the Germans occupy the town?"

"I don't know," he answered in an indifferent tone of voice. "I am sure I don't know."

After exchanging a few civilities, and informing each other about our families and those who were missing, we parted. The

fat Ladislaus went his way and I went mine. But where did my way lead? Where?

I was grateful to him because his lazy, nonchalant answer made me realize my position. Was I going to polish the shoes of the German soldiers? or was I to clear the streets of the debris? I moved on depressed, aimless. Parties of civilians and disarmed soldiers were dismantling the barricades in Jerusalem Boulevard. Slowly, without enthusiasm, they flattened the trenches, levelled the road and removed the rubbish. We had to pave the road of victory for the Germans, so that their victorious army might enter comfortably, with all their drums and trumpets.

I mingled with the crowd.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GERMANS FROM THE KITCHEN DOOR

THE streets were overflowing with people, for everybody had so much to do now that the siege was over; there was food to be got, families, shelter or one's unit to be found; above all, views to be exchanged in endless speculation and inference. Every now and then the people would stop to look at something, or make sure there were no more goods in a shop, or to read the typewritten announcements displayed on the walls. As only those who were very close could see these, people in the crowd clamoured to have them read aloud, and someone with a liking for speechifying would declaim the manifesto in which the Warsaw Command thanked the soldiers and the population for having fulfilled their duty, and called upon them now to obey the authorities to the last instructions.

Little groups of people eddied in front of the walls, on which the last issue of the *Kurjer Warszawski* had been posted. It was only a single sheet, but how even that was printed heaven alone knows. That old Warsaw daily had performed its duty to the end. "To-morrow we may not appear any more. We do not know for how long we may have to suspend publication. The tragic hour for Warsaw has struck." And it continued: "We were treacherously stabbed in the back when our army was busy fighting a mortal enemy. We do not know how much of our country will be occupied by the Muscovites."

I was near Holy Cross Church when I read these words on the wall. I rubbed my forehead. . . . Yes, the Bolsheviks are on the move. The frontier between the German and the Russian zones was not yet finally delineated; so probably it was not yet closely guarded. What am I going to do here? The old people and the women are not in such immediate danger, but the men?

Shall I have to serve the Germans? Can I not go on working for the cause I have chosen; democracy and the liberty of man? And suddenly I remembered the airman to whom I had given the coin this morning.

Just then a little girl passed with her father through the crowd. She was tired and plodded along behind him holding his hand. She seemed to have been asking him questions, but all I could hear was:

"So you say that we shall have the Germans on this side of the Vistula and the Bolsheviks will take the other side? Will they take Praga?"

This question had an extraordinary effect on me, as though I had suddenly been shaken out of a deep sleep. It was the birth of an idea. In a second my whole plan of action was there, clear and imperative. They will not get me! No! To Praga, to the Bolsheviks and then further, further to freedom! The Bolsheviks were not yet in Praga, but if they moved west at all the fronts would change, and if only I could get far enough east, I should find myself in their territory. Later I should have to see about getting away from them. The first step was to fall into the hands of the Bolsheviks! Such was my plan. It was very risky, but in the circumstances it was the only commendable one. I still believed that, if the war continued, the German part of Poland would one day be redeemed, when the Allies had won. On the other hand, if I got caught in Russian occupied territory, who knows how many years I might not rot among the Bolsheviks without any prospect of ever being free, of ever joining my colleagues and resuming my researches. But my choice was made: I decided to stake everything and to go east so as to be able ultimately to reach the west.

I spoke to several people in the street. The general feeling was that the Russians would occupy the country east of the Vistula. This sounded fairly logical and obvious as the Vistula did form a natural frontier.

There was no time to be lost. People were already telling each other: "Who wants to be with the Bolsheviks ought to go to Praga; who wants to be with the Germans stays here." I thought

that the bridges might be closed at any time, and that would make my escape much more complicated. Two things still had to be decided. Should I go alone, or would it be better to have someone with me? and which way, south-east or north-east? The answer to the first question was obvious: I must have a companion. The second would have to be settled with him, but I preferred the north. But whom should I choose as my companion and where to find him? Normally in towns there are telephones, people have their homes, you know where they live and there are buses and taxis to take you there. How did I know now who was in town, or where to look for them? I must recruit my companion not amongst friends but in the street, and without loss of time. One of all these numerous men in uniform or mufti would have to become my companion at once—now.

Several officers and young N.C.O.s passed before I plucked up courage to stop one. I told him that I was planning to escape so as to fight for Poland with the Allies. He looked at me, but he did not know me; besides he was still technically on active service and, not realizing the situation, thought that to discard his uniform and escape would be desertion. It was no use trying to convince him; he did not understand that a few hours hence or, at the best, in a few days, he would be under German rule. The problem was clear enough. Most of the officers, though they would fight no longer, had to remain on duty and report in the Citadel and their superiors could not openly tell them to escape, seeing that the conditions of surrender included the internment of officers, to whom the enemy were to grant honourable treatment.

But I was undeterred and resolved to get a companion. Several times I met with refusal or was asked to wait for an answer. Not everybody could make up their minds at a moment's notice to take such a vital step with a complete stranger met in the street, and others preferred to see things through with their fellows. But I persevered in the conviction that my scheme of escape was essentially good and right. A young lieutenant came along; I stopped him and presented my plan. He would come but wanted first to say good-bye to his fiancée, and agreed to meet me in

half-an-hour at an appointed place. He did not come, though I waited a whole hour till it was nearly noon.

One of my stipulations was that my companion should speak fluent Russian, a condition easily fulfilled as most people coming from the eastern provinces knew that language tolerably well. With practice my technique of accosting people improved and finally luck brought me a lieutenant who had the same intention as I, to leave the city at once so as not to fall into the hands of the Germans. He told me that he wanted to join the Allied forces.

When you are going to share good and bad fortune with a man and risk your life with his, there is no time to be stand-offish. We found a common language at once and were friends from the start. No introductions were necessary, and indeed we did not even tell each other our surnames. Nor had we time to relate our life histories; there were much more important things to be done: but my lieutenant did mention that his christian name was Marjan and that he had served in the Army Police.

Marjan looked as though he were strong and had plenty of pluck, and he certainly knew a lot about preparing for a trek. Like all practical people he started with the question of food. In fact this was about all we had to do in the way of preparation. I did not want to deprive my parents and Zula of the few tins still left at home, but we had to get it somehow, at least enough for two days if we were not to starve. However, what one could not do, two could. In Marshal Pilsudski Square was a military lorry which had just arrived with a load of cases on which was stencilled "Military Tins—Beef—144 pieces." The last of the military stores were being distributed among the soldiers of the Warsaw garrison.

Marjan was still in uniform, and I in flannels. The corridors of the military command where the food was stored were full of soldiers, but Marjan walked in with all the self-assurance in the world and asked for food. It was not so easy to reach the supply officer, but Marjan told them that he was joining the Polish Legion in France and must get in at once. A few moments later



I saw him emerging with a discomfited look, carrying two large pound tins of bully beef.

"Why do you look so dejected?" I said. "It's marvellous that you wangled that."

"Yes, but only two. That is not enough. Now you must try; perhaps they will give you some more."

I wasn't so successful, but managed to obtain an additional one for myself.

"For civilians we can only spare one tin," said the officer.

I promised to provide Marjan with all the necessary clothes, but our house was miles from the centre of Warsaw and we had to hurry as every minute, we felt, was precious. We had made up our minds to leave Warsaw before night. But there was no transport whatever to be had and it was a good two hours' walk to our house.

"Walk!" exclaimed Marjan, who was just as enthusiastic about our project as I, "but who would dream of walking? We will get a lift."

Before going to my home Marjan went in to say good-bye to some friends, who had a photographer's shop on the way, while I tried to buy a penknife. There were, however, no shops open. When Marjan reappeared he had a little parcel under his arm. The photographer's wife had given him an old pair of her husband's trousers.

We were walking along as fast as we could when an ambulance column also going towards Mokotow overtook us. We waved our arms to stop it, but the drivers, having met with this request from pedestrians at every few yards, did not take any notice. What was our joy when in one of the cars I saw Kiemnowicz. We shouted his name, and he looked round and stopped.

"Give us a lift, Kiemnowicz; you can't refuse."

"Well, all right, cram in quickly, we have no time to waste," and off we went in the right direction. Stan did not look as self-confident as usual. He had been ordered to stay in Warsaw with the wounded. We did not tell him about our plan, as we had thought it best to keep it to ourselves as much as possible.

Stan took us at least half a mile on our way, then we shook

hands, thanked him and walked on again, immersed in working out the details of our escape, how we were to dress, how behave and which way to go. There was, of course, not much use in planning very far ahead, as we did not know what obstacles we might encounter on the way.

"Ultimately we should like to find ourselves in Britain, but from a Warsaw surrounded by a double ring of enemies, that is looking rather far ahead."

"Don't let's think about the 'afterwards,'" said Marjan, who showed a definite dislike of worrying about more than one thing at a time. "Let's get out of Warsaw first."

We did not know whether the Baltic states still existed.

"Shall we try to go to Lithuania?" said I.

"I should imagine that it would be better to try Latvia."

"Why Latvia?" said I. "I thought Lithuania was nearer? Our frontier with Latvia is so short."

"So it is, but Latvia is farthest from both Germany and Russia. Should either of them acquire a thirst for further conquests, Germany is likely to invade Lithuania with which she has a common frontier, while Russia would probably attack Estonia first. Latvia being in between them stands the best chance of being still in existence when we get there. But that we shall be able to decide later, once we are east of the German zone."

I agreed with him. I now began to wonder how I was to tell my parents and Zula about our scheme, which would certainly appear mad to them. It was rather like looking for trouble. Marjan, however, did not give me much time to worry, as he spotted a furniture van going our way and we made haste to jump up behind and were soon home. I introduced Marjan as a university friend whom I had chanced to meet, not wanting the whole house to know about our plan. We found a neighbour there who wanted me to take on night duty with the auxiliary Civic Guard, but I cut short his long rigmarole rather briskly, I am afraid.

When I was alone with my parents I told them briefly about our plans. Instead of being shocked, mother seemed quite relieved and said: "Bless you, my dear. I will give you a lift across the

bridge; that will save you at least three hours' walk and you will feel fresher to start."

What an angel! Father hated the idea because he was afraid of mother returning alone from Praga, but she insisted and that was that.

We both changed very quickly, but exchanged waistcoats so that they did not match our suits and made us look more disreputable. In the hurry I twice put mine on inside out. Twice! Cook, who is superstitious, told me that, in the language of the occult, that meant a bad adventure which would end well. So much the better. Our little bags were soon packed. We took a change of linen, spare boots and socks and our food, the precious tins of beef, a little bag of coffee, some sugar, and a rug which we twisted up so that we could put it across our shoulders like a plaid. In a suit case left behind by an officer who had been billeted on us in the early days of the war, I found a warm pair of mittens. Who knew whether he would ever come back for them? A few other necessities were added to our luggage and all the needless things Bronka wanted us to take rejected. We should have required three mules to carry those.

While we were packing and changing mother sewed my passport and other documents I might need later into the lining of my coat. Zula gave me a few jewels, a gold wrist-watch and a few coins, some of which were old, while I left all my larger banknotes behind, feeling sure that they would not be needed and might only cause trouble, especially when we were in the territory occupied by the Bolsheviks.

Marjan, who, as regards packing and catering, was much more practical than myself, stuck to the theory that there was no need to bother about equipment, because one could always acquire it on the way. Food was the only necessary item; if you had it, and kept your wits about you, you couldn't perish. But food was the one thing of which we were short.

Mother gave us some hot gruel which was nice and filling, and then we were ready to go. I kissed Zula goodbye, bade farewell to father, who looked at us as though we were condemned to death, said goodbye to Bronka and the cook and told them not

to mention where we were going, took a shabby old coat of Felix's and a beret. Warm clothes were indispensable, as it was already the end of September and we did not know where we should spend the winter—perhaps in Siberia.

A last tender look at the house, at the remaining old pictures which had been there since I was a boy, and we were away. Mother really performed miracles in finding her way through the battered streets. From the large viaduct we gazed back for the last time. This part of the town was very quiet and there were but few people and still fewer vehicles crossing over to the other side of the river. More were coming into the city, for nobody wanted to be cut off and left on the wrong side. Finally, after negotiating all sorts of obstacles, we crossed the bridge. There was something eerie about that crossing.

"Don't go any farther, mother. We are far enough already. We will get out here. We will try to let you know how we get along. Cheer up! When we come back it will be with the victors—and from the West. And above all do not believe a word the Germans say. You will be fed on lies, which are just meant to dishearten you. Don't believe them."

"Here is a penknife for you," said mother, "that you must have." She knew that I had lost mine.

An affectionate kiss and the car turned back and disappeared over the bridge.

That was the end of a chapter. Now forward into the unknown, forward to tackle our fate!

I put on my rucksack, Marjan shouldered his leather bag and the rug, and we set off towards Praga. One of the first things the soldier learns is the necessity for reconnaissance and Marjan and I realized that this was doubly necessary for us, if we were not to fall into traps—that would mean the end of our journey and, at the best, internment for the duration of the war. Fortunately for our plans the place was not deserted. There was a thin stream of people moving towards Warsaw and we were always able to ask them how the land lay. We had to locate the Germans exactly.

"The Germans?" one boy said. "They are in Goclawek, but

they don't shoot at people. My brother was allowed to go to Warsaw."

"They speak Polish," added another youngster.

"How do you know?"

"A friend of mine spoke with two German soldiers; they gave him German cigarettes. I can swear that; I saw they were Germans."

That, at the moment, was all we wanted to know. We thanked the boys and told them that we were going to an aunt in Praga. We caught up with a detachment of infantry straggling along and all out of step. They were already disarmed and some were even half in mufti. Marjan joined them for a while and I walked along on the pavement. The detachment was going up to the German lines to be sent to the camps. They had been told that they would be allowed to go home as soon as they left Warsaw. The Germans evidently were taking the precaution, probably stipulated in the terms of surrender, of getting our soldiers out of the city before they marched in.

The main point established was that the Germans allowed certain categories of people to cross into the territory they already occupied. But we could not, of course, ascertain what was going on on the other side of their line. Whether the people were interned. Everybody talked about the Russians coming to Praga. Some said that was why the Germans were not devastating the place, as they knew that they would shortly have to leave and were afraid of a stab in the back. Somebody going in our direction alluded to negotiations said to be in progress in Moscow between the German foreign minister and Stalin.

Marjan and I decided that we would pass ourselves off as civilians and keep away from military units. That, we thought, would enable us to move more freely, and we could always claim that we were going home. With so many houses destroyed or burned we could always pretend that one of them was ours, while as soldiers we could be stopped and interned. As we walked along the main road towards the suburbs expecting every moment to run into the German sentries, we argued as to the professions we should assume. After a fierce discussion it was decided that I

should be an accountant's clerk, while Marjan was to be a waiter. He wanted at first to be a barber.

"My dear Marjan, if they catch you and you say you are a barber, you will have to go on shaving the Germans till the end of the war and perhaps till the end of your days. There is no more valuable profession in the army. We must not follow trades which are of any military use."

The air was tainted with the smoke of a huge fire somewhere behind us. This, according to the people of Praga, was at the Tobacco Monopoly.

"What a pity there was still a large stock of cigarettes and cigars." And another voice added: "The Spirits Monopoly have been encouraging people to help themselves to the bottles, preferring to have their drink go down Polish throats rather than see it taken by the enemy."

As we drew farther away from the city we encountered more soldiers and fewer civilians, the latter proceeding with evident circumspection. We realized that we could not walk on like this for ever, but that at some bend in the road we should be stopped by the Germans. We did not even know whether our own people might not stop us before that and turn us back. It was always possible.

Every few yards the tales we heard became more and more unpleasant.

"The Germans are searching everybody. They rummage in all your pockets and confiscate everything, even penknives. They allow only one tin of food. No use taking more."

We went on nevertheless. We could not escape unless we got out of the town, and to cut across the fields would, we felt, be even more risky. You could be shot at and if they caught you and decided that you were an officer, there would be no appeal; it would mean the concentration camp. It was better, therefore, to go on and see.

We met a party of people coming back with their bundles.

"You won't pass. They are only allowing soldiers through. We were told that civilians will be allowed out of the town to-morrow at noon. They speak Polish."

We thanked them and pushed on.

"No use trying, they won't let you pass."

More thanks. We had at least found out that there were none of our own people to turn us back. The first hurdle was the German sentry-post at Goclawek, on the main road outside the police station. From that point the Germans were entrenched in a ring all round the city.

We dawdled along behind a group of soldiers. Some were depressed and hung their heads, but others did not seem much upset and tried to instil courage into their friends. Though still free, there was already something of the prisoner of war about their demeanour. Soldiers, but not quite!

Marjan and I inspected each other to see if we looked our parts.

"Yes, you really look like a waiter, Marjan, but do I look like an accountant of the baser kind?"

"Yes," answered Marjan, then suddenly gripped my hand.

"That's surely one of theirs," he whispered.

A German ambulance car, all green save for a large Red Cross, was coming slowly towards us. Two German soldiers in their bluish grey tunics and steel helmets, with a badge on either side, sat proudly in front as if they knew the way to Warsaw by heart. Immediately behind them followed a whole line of German ambulances. On one of them sat a Polish officer who was accompanying the unit.

"I should not like to be in his place," whispered Marjan.

"Nor I. However, perhaps they are returning some of our wounded soldiers and fetching theirs."

"That's quite possible."

A Polish ambulance, larger than the German one, was standing in front of the church and Marjan went up to the driver.

"Colleague," he said, in the way our soldiers spoke to each other, "what have the Germans got in there?"

"They are supposed to be returning our wounded, but there is not enough accommodation in Warsaw. They are also bringing back their own wounded and the German prisoners from the Citadel."

Still more cars came along and had to negotiate the trenches and overturned tramcars.

"Those ambulances, they haven't got any wounded except perhaps one to shield their own gunners. You don't imagine it's our men they are sending into the city? The cowards have to hide behind the Red Cross."

"But why?" said I, surprised.

"They take every possible precaution. Why should they expose their machine-gunners, whom they send up as an advance guard, to any danger? They prefer to shield them behind our wounded or a nurse. They can't even trust people when they have capitulated and given their word. Disgusting!" exploded the driver, and spat on the ground.

Indeed, it did not seem very heroic to move gunners in Red Cross ambulances. But war is war and I suppose one has to take every possible precaution.

As I made this apology for the Germans Marjan signed to me to move on. More civilians were coming back disappointed.

"They won't let you pass till to-morrow noon."

Some women added: "You had better go back, there's no use in arguing. They also say that soup will be distributed to the people by their Red Cross at various points in the city."

"Soup, German soup, probably made of potatoes and meat which they have stolen in Poland," remarked a passing soldier.

"Still, many of us will have to eat it, if we don't want to starve," said a woman.

"Yes, that is part of our tragedy."

Plodding behind a small detachment of our soldiers we passed a line of deep trenches. The first soldier proceeded holding a stick with a white cloth attached to it, which could still be seen from some distance, though dusk was coming on and everything beginning to get grey. The shattered houses and factories on either side of the road were a fitting setting to this impending transformation of soldiers into prisoners of war, and possibly even slaves.

We were very near the Germans now. Marjan was pale and pressed his lips tightly together. We allowed the soldiers to get well ahead of us and dragged along very slowly, watching the



position carefully. We could already see German uniforms in the distance and the beefy faces of the sentries, with rifles, shepherding a party of our soldiers. They were made to line up one behind the other and advance singly; they obeyed, moving slowly forward, keeping their hands up on command, as if in a physical fitness class. Those who still had rifles or gas masks handed them to the Germans, who piled them all opposite the police station, about a hundred yards farther on.

We raised our hands like everybody else. A soldier came and felt my pockets and round my waist. In my trousers' pocket he found a large ball-shaped lighter and asked what it was. I showed him by producing a spark and he returned it to me and passed on to the next person in the queue. We were now supposed to move on to the main line of sentries a little farther along. Even from where we were I could hear a German shouting in broken Polish:

"The civilians coming to-morrow! No civilians to-day!"

"Back!"

There was nothing for it but to turn back. Marjan was very depressed. He was not a person who took defeat well and was immediately convinced that all our plans would go astray. But I easily consoled him.

"What will you give me if we succeed in passing the German lines?"

"A bottle of champagne when we reach our destination."

"Right, it's a promise."

"Whatever we do, we cannot return to Warsaw."

"Of course not; they may close the bridges and then we're done."

"There is nothing doing here, not a single house left where one could shelter. You cannot very well sleep on those bits of broken brick."

"Don't you know any place where we could doss down for the night?" asked Marjan.

I had a brain wave. "Yes, I do. You will have a decent sleep to-night. We'll try that convent near the church. I know the

priest quite well, he is a most hospitable man and a friend of ours."

That meant walking back, but we did not mind. The prospect of having a sleep was too tempting, after so many sleepless nights. Then we heard behind us the clatter of iron tyres. It was a military wagon drawn by two horses and driven by one of our soldiers. Marjan stopped it and after a few friendly words with the driver we were happily jolting back towards the convent. The driver had a loaf of bread, a real loaf, a luxury unheard of in Warsaw for at least a week, and Marjan had with him a whole packet of cigars which he smoked one after another. A satisfactory deal was soon made, half a loaf for a handful of cigars. A propitious start.

Having half a loaf of bread we knew that we should be accepted with open arms anywhere, and the plump priest and the nuns received us very hospitably. The pale-faced prioress ordered food for us—some pastry it was, and Marjan very rashly disclosed the fact of our having tinned meat. A tin of beef appeared on the table as though it were still a thing you just went out and bought. But then Marjan hated abstinence and food was for him the alpha and omega of life. The priest told us that the town council of Praga had had a meeting that day and decided to change the name of the borough to Praga-on-the-Vistula. He was much excited about this, which he regarded as a sure sign that the Bolsheviks were coming. "Why otherwise should they change the old name of the borough?"

We soon discovered that we were not the only guests in the convent. The nuns were sheltering a number of casual visitors, soldiers and refugees in the large dining-room in the basement, and there were several clergymen in the bedrooms. With us was a young priest who had disguised himself as a schoolmaster and planned to leave the next morning in a cart, pretending he was going to his village. He wanted us to come with him, but we politely declined.

In spite of hostilities being over, the windows were still blacked-out with thick mattresses. The convent was intact though the church nearby had been hit by shrapnel. The prioress ascribed

their safety to the special intervention of Saint Mary, the patron of the convent. Marjan listened to the pale smiling nun's explanation and ate voraciously as if he wanted to lay in a store of energy for the next three days. He was telling the nuns about his campaign and the way the cavalry had charged the tanks, a most dangerous feat. He had seen Polish boys lie in wait for the tanks and hammer the barrels of their machine-guns with heavy iron bars till they bent them and so rendered them harmless. Others stuck iron bars in the caterpillars, forcing the tank to move in a circle. Listening to his stories I gathered a little of his past history. Hitherto we really had not had time to tell each other anything about ourselves, but I now learned that he had been in Russia up to the age of seventeen and that he was familiar with the Bolsheviki. That piece of information I greeted with the utmost satisfaction, anticipating that at some stage in our escape such knowledge could well be most useful.

Marjan's theory about equipment was amply confirmed. One of the nuns told us that they had some luggage belonging to Colonel Mirecki who had been killed in action and the prioress, who was very much afraid of keeping it, asked us if we would be good enough to look through his things and see if there was anything to which the Germans might take exception. The suit cases were brand new and beautifully packed. We found all sorts of useful things, some of which very well supplemented our own equipment. In one case Marjan found a large collection of papers, pencils, a set of compasses and maps. Obviously the colonel had been a gunner. We also found a number of metal army corps stamps and some documents. These we handed to the prioress whose entire confidence Marjan had gained, telling her that they must not fall into the hands of the enemy. She passed them in turn to a nun in a big white starched head-dress as though they were the litter of Beelzebub, with an order to burn them completely, while the stamps, which would not burn, she herself took to the pond and drowned with her own hands.

Marjan was a very practical person. Having found an alarm clock in the luggage he put it in his bag and also took a handful of the pencils. Our finds included some useful first-aid packets

and other utensils. To make himself still more popular in the convent and with the refugees he gave a short fur jacket to the housekeeper and a pair of full-dress trousers to one of the men. In fact, he distributed things right and left as if he were an American millionaire. And why not? Why should the unfortunate colonel's things go to the enemy? Rather give them to those who needed them.

After dinner we had a little talk with the nuns and the priest. They were all deeply concerned about the future. The priest saw everything black and said that all the forces of anti-Christ had united. He thought that Italy and Japan might join the German-Russian friendship, considered that France was capable of making sacrifices for the ideal of freedom, but feared that Britain might slacken and prove unable to bear the burden of war. On my asking him whether he knew Britain, he frankly answered that he did not.

"But I am afraid that the idea of comfort and routine in life has become so ingrained in them that they will not react to the danger with all their available resources. And if they wait it may be too late."

I asked him whether he had ever seen John Bull pictured with a bull dog. He had.

"Well, they are slow to bite, but what they grip, they hold. You either have to cut the foot or the dog's head off."

He liked my simile and laughed thoughtfully.

He resumed after a moment: "Two officers have already committed suicide in this very churchyard. They could not stand the idea of giving themselves up to the enemy. One came to the church for a last prayer before killing himself. He is a great sinner from the viewpoint of the church."

"Indeed he is, but I understand him."

"So do I," whispered the priest. "But isn't it shameful that Smigly-Rydz and Beck should have escaped to Roumania, leaving their men here?"

I knew that the dear priest could not bear Beck, who for some reason or other was hated by the devout Catholics—some said because of his divorce.

"We haven't yet got all the facts," I said. "The way you put the case the German wireless could not improve on it. That is exactly what they said. 'Poles, your generals and ministers have deserted you!'"

"Haven't they?" insisted the priest.

"On the face of it they have, but to judge, we must know their motives. I know that you will disagree with me, but I still think that Beck was a very wise man and that the way he conducted his policy was mainly correct. It was not our fault that we were weaker than the Germans and Russians combined and got nothing but kind words in the way of help from our friends abroad."

"Was it right to quarrel with the Czechs during the Munich crisis last autumn?"

"There," I said, "I completely agree with you. International politics, like the conduct of individuals, must be based on moral laws. Had Beck done that, I should be entirely with him."

"What about Smigly-Rydz?"

"I don't think you can speak of him as a coward; he was certainly not that. But I always thought him limited; how else could he stand all that adulation which was offered him? Why did he go to Roumania? Was he cut off? Neither you nor I know that."

By this time Marjan was already yawning mightily as though his mouth would split. The hint was plain enough.

"You will have a strenuous day," said the priest to whom we had confided our plans; "perhaps we had better all retire to bed. I am sure that Sister Aniela is also very tired."

*Friday, 29th September*

Noon was the great moment for which everybody in the convent was waiting, that being the time when the Germans were to allow civilians to leave the city. As it would take us nearly two hours to walk to Goclawek we decided to leave soon after ten, so as to be able to pass the sentries early. We got up, however, much earlier, for we had various things to do and we wanted to repack our bags. I did not like having my gold coins loose in my pocket;

they were a good part of our fortune and ought to be hidden. The young priest who slept in our room had a brilliant idea.

"They are quite small coins; cover them with pieces of white cloth so that they look like buttons and sew them on to your underclothes. No one on earth will ever think of that. To make them look better, put two black pencil marks on each like holes."

With the help of one of the sisters we sewed the buttons on to my pants. She felt a little shy, but Sister Aniela told her to get on with it because we had no time to waste. The job was done so neatly that even I myself could not distinguish the real buttons from the others. Marjan did the same, and also concealed his gold bracelet under his shirt cuff. All our preparations made, we went to breakfast which consisted of the bread we had brought yesterday and pearl-barley with gravy. No royal feast could have tasted better. I put my diary in a side pocket where I could get at it easily and then, not liking the look of my beret, exchanged it for a forage cap from which I carefully removed all the badges. Many civilians wear them, so there was nothing strange in that; on the other hand we thought it would be useful to be able, when necessary, to become soldiers or officers as the situation required. We had to pack what we had taken of the colonel's equipment in a haversack, to be carried by Marjan, as his load was quite light. We took the beret all the same in case of emergency, because Marjan decided to replace his square cap by my winter fur hat which was very warm, but looked a little too dressy.

We were now quite ready, but, as we still had some time to spare, we went out. A little morning mist and a chill in the air promised that the day would be beautiful and sunny. Round the convent was a little garden, lying between the public square on one side and the road on the other. The leaves of its old trees were beginning to take on the first yellows and browns of autumn. At the foot a chestnut tree, which spread its rich crown in a large circle, was a bench and here we sat looking at all that was going on around. I had not noticed when we arrived yesterday evening that outside the convent the soldiers had made a large

heap of various things they did not want to take with them—parts of rifles, army belts, scores of gas masks in green tin boxes, cartridges and loaded machine-gun belts. The nuns were much afraid of having all this in their garden and continually implored the soldiers to remove the heap. Outside the convent was a complete heavy machine-gun on a two-wheeled cart. Near the heap lay an Alsatian motionless, his head to the ground, arched, as Alsations lie, in a curve with the hind legs near the head. He lay there motionless and at first we thought he must be dead. He was rather like a paper-weight and as such would have been very decorative, but as he was a real dog the sight was pitiful. Marjan called him and the dog slowly opened his eyes and seemed for a moment to be reproaching us for interrupting his mourning, but he did not move. His eyes were almost speaking, almost telling of something pathetic that had happened and yet we could see that he was not hurt in any way. Marjan tried to entice him with a piece of bread, thinking that perhaps he was hungry, but it did not tempt him. The brown pupils were fixed on the distance with the bluish-white of the eyeballs shining above them like two crescents. We had to call several times before he would move, then he approached quite confidently and allowed himself to be patted, accepting our caresses like a child that is comforted after being hurt.

"What has happened to that dog?" Marjan asked the caretaker's wife.

"It has been lying like that since yesterday evening. It belonged to that corporal who shot himself behind the church; he couldn't bear the idea of surrender. He was one of those sturdy soldiers from a Poznan regiment. He said he would never let a German have his rifle . . . and he didn't."

"How sad."

"Several officers shot themselves last night. We have found two bodies in our garden. They all shoot themselves in the mouth and you find them in a pool of blood."

We heard the sound of explosions coming from the garden.

"What's that noise?" asked Marjan.

"The soldiers and the boys are exploding hand grenades in the

river. They don't want them to go to the Germans. They spent all yesterday morning throwing equipment into the water. There must be thousands of rifles and shells in the bed of the Vistula by now."

"A good thing too. At least the Germans won't get them."

As we were talking a few little boys who had been lurking outside the hedge came in and began grubbing in the heap of equipment. They stuffed their pockets with cartridges and disappeared.

"Oh, if I were their mother I should box their ears well for picking up ammunition," said the caretaker's wife.

"Imagine what dreadful accidents will happen when those brats start playing with powder."

But who knew where their mothers were?

It was time for us to go. I loaded my rucksack, put it on and slung the blanket across my shoulders, and Marjan fastened on his two bags. By now everybody knew of our plans and we received innumerable blessings. The priest made the sign of the cross three times on our foreheads and wished us godspeed.

"Could we take the dog with us?" asked Marjan.

"By all means, it isn't ours, take it if it will follow you, but I rather doubt it."

We had a wonderful send-off and at the lychgate Marjan turned and whistled and the dog followed us. We smiled farewell to all the nuns and the priest who had so generously sheltered us and dived into the crowd in the dusty street. The dog kept with us for a while with hanging tail. If properly fed he could have been a very good dog. However, the farther we went from the church the oftener we had to call him, and finally he went after another dog and made his way back to the church. He did not take to new masters, so we had to go on without our mascot.

In the bright daylight the destruction in Praga seemed worse than in the dusk of yesterday evening. All the left side of Grochowska Street was shattered and burned; of one factory their remained only the outer walls of the hall with the cranks and wheels lying among the rubble and masonry; no roof to cover



it, only an occasional rafter not yet completely consumed by the flames.

Scattered units, occasionally led by an officer, were making their way towards the German lines. To-day we again saw our police armed and on duty; yesterday there had only been the Civic Guard. Against this stream of people flowing out of the city drove the German ambulances, several of which passed us. What the plan for evacuating the garrison from Warsaw was we, of course, did not know, but considerable as was the stream of soldiers trickling along this road, their numbers were small compared to those in Warsaw, and at this rate it would probably take weeks to empty the city of them.

Marjan and I kept close together and we talked all the time notwithstanding the thick dust which made our lips dry and chalky.

"We mustn't say a word about our plans. It was different with the nuns, but now we must be very careful."

"Of course we must," agreed Marjan.

"We are going home now, and whenever anybody asks what we're doing, we are just *going home*."

"I shall feel much better," said Marjan, "once we have passed the German lines. I do not share your optimism. You will see that they will prove a formidable obstacle; and who knows whether we shall pass them at all."

Something strange was happening on our left. Among the ruins was a group of men with large cameras. From time to time we saw them giving sweets to children, grouping them in front of the ruins, and making them smile while they photographed them. We went a little nearer and saw that the party was German. They wore long plus-fours and were accompanied by German officers. A little farther down the road were five private cars. The cameramen were exceedingly busy. One of them was filming some children with whom two soldiers were trying to play and whom they were attempting to keep smiling by offers of chocolates. The children felt shy, crossed their little legs, arched their bodies, and when they accepted the chocolates held them in their hands till they melted. Their little mouths were rings of

brown. The cameras clicked busily away at the children, soldiers, and the ruins of the factory. A German officer in an immaculate uniform with an armband showing that he belonged to the press section was giving the most detailed explanations to the party of photographers and pressmen. The drivers formed a little group, smoked cigarettes, and from time to time frightened off curious boys who happened to come too near. Like a flock of wild birds the boys scattered in all directions as soon as one of the drivers turned his head.

As we advanced we passed several German military cars, mostly Opels. They moved slowly in the dust of the conquered street as if they were afraid of getting dirty. They looked brand new, and no doubt they were, for the war had only lasted four weeks. Moreover, they probably used the newest they had to impress the population. The officers, invariably in gloves and steel helmets or forage caps, were efficient looking and proud, and scarcely took any notice of the interested Poles staring at their new masters.

In front of us was a little obelisk commemorating the opening of the road, and it was here that the first German sentries stood. They did not stop anybody, but those who asked were told that even to-day civilians would not be allowed to leave the city. The real ring of sentries began some distance farther on, and there we were stopped and turned back.

"This is really dreadful," said Marjan. "They won't let us go. What shall we do?"

"We must try our best. It is possible that they will not allow the population to move until the Bolsheviks take possession of Praga."

"Do you think so?"

"I don't know, but it is vital for us to get out of the town as fast as we can."

We also arranged that if either of us were allowed to pass and the other stopped the lucky one would wait at an appointed place.

"We shall wait for each other even if it means a week or more."

A number of German aeroplanes were flying overhead so low that you could nearly see their markings. They were evidently

patrolling the ground. We also saw a larger passenger aeroplane coming from the east.

"There must be a lot of diplomatic activity going on, otherwise we shouldn't see all these aeroplanes," remarked Marjan.

"Who knows. They may be carrying German generals, but I rather think you're right."

As yesterday, dozens of people retraced their steps to the city, others sat along the side of the road, or on the lawns of the houses which lined it.

"Not till Monday morning. No use trying. It only makes them annoyed and they call you names."

The news spread from mouth to mouth :

"No use trying. Monday morning. Monday morning."

We walked along very slowly, bumping against the shoal of men, women and children returning with their bundles.

"What are we going to do? How are we going to live till Monday?" was the continual query of these poor wretches, many of whom were hungry and exhausted. They must wait, wait patiently; that was all they were allowed to do. And how great a contrast between them with their quiet resignation and the German soldiers dressed cleanly, well fed, satisfied and cocksure. They were separated by the wall which divides masters and servants.

There was nothing for us to do but to follow the others. We sat down on the green outside the hospital of the Albertine Fathers at the foot of a small statue of the Virgin. The hospital was burned out except for a part of the ground floor, and the little statue of the blessed Virgin was riddled with bullets. From the hospital came the sound of a piano, where one of a group of young boys was playing peasant songs in the only room which had escaped the fire. They had been already waiting there several hours and had nothing to do.

On either side of the hospital were ruins of small houses, of which nothing remained but bricks and the chimneys, and behind them some allotments all trampled and bare save for a few asters and other late flowers. Nobody wanted those. Nearby was a

tall factory chimney, so riddled that it looked like a Venetian window, threatening any moment to collapse.

With us on the lawn sat two gypsy women, some respectable-looking workmen, a soldier from the province of Polesia, and a number of other people. In a casual congregation of that kind the spirit of comradeship springs up at once and before long Marjan had organized a digging party which went to see if there were any potatoes still left in the fields. They returned with some potatoes as well as carrots and beetroots. In the meantime I had made a fire, and hanging over it an iron pot we boiled some water and made a kind of improvised soup. Our pot was the centre of attraction. A man stopped and asked whether he might warm his sausage in it, and we gladly agreed as it would help to give the soup a flavour. As a "toll" I cut off a small slice and minced it into the soup. Our appetites were good, but the soup was very watery and we were left still feeling hungry. I had the utmost difficulty in stopping Marjan from "slaughtering" a tin of beef and had to make faces at him not to commit such an act of folly in front of this famished crowd. Those tins were our most precious possession, and the reluctant Marjan had to give in. Slowly he got up and walked down to the road where he tried to stop the passing soldiers, some of whom had good supplies of dry bread and biscuits.

"No use taking all those supplies. The Germans will not allow you to keep them all. Have a good tuck in colleagues, and let us have some. It's better to enjoy a meal than to let the Boches take it from you."

Most of them were not moved by these appeals to their generosity, but one or two did give him an odd biscuit or a slice of bread. Then we decided to try digging a little farther afield. This was slightly risky, because it was not far from the German outposts. Here in town on the main road the Germans showed their very best side, answering questions coldly but politely and parading in motor cars; but what they were like in the fields away from all these crowds of people we did not know. However, we made up a little party, which included the soldier from Polesia. He frankly admitted:

"I will always work for whoever feeds me. The rest do not interest me."

Half-an-hour later we came back, having found a field of potatoes without encountering any Germans. We boiled the potatoes and ate them without salt. Our meal over, I pulled out my diary but, as my fountain pen was dry, I borrowed one of Marjan's many pencils.

It looks as though we are going to spend a long time sitting on the grass opposite the hospital. Thank goodness it is not raining. We sit and watch the German cars passing along the road. Some of the officers wear monocles and they all look the same, clean and proud. The older ones have scars on their faces from the duels of their cadet days. How they can regard them as decorations I cannot understand, but they do. They do all sorts of things nobody else understands. The younger ones, however, don't have these scars on their cheeks and chins. Many of the soldiers have flowers stuck in the barrels of their rifles. I am sure they never got them from our girls.

Nobody knows what things are like behind the German lines in the part already occupied by them. People also want to know whether the Bolsheviks are moving as far as the Vistula. Whenever a more kindly looking soldier comes along people crowd round him and ask. Usually the men prefer to send the women first as they are less likely to be snubbed, but as soon as it is seen that the soldiers do answer, the men follow their womenfolk and crowd round them till all you can see is their steel helmets and the flowers in their rifles. People have more trust in the German Red Cross men, and if an ambulance happens to stop and one gets out he is surrounded by curious questioners. It is surprising that most of these men speak Polish. I myself have talked to at least half-a-dozen who did. Their Polish is jungle Polish, but you can understand them.

"Passing will be possible later. Later passing," chanted a soldier with the air of a dictator, firmly but politely.

An exasperating refrain. However, it was no use trying. If the Germans were not yet ready, what could we do? Of what importance was the individual, especially in an enemy country?

We were like cattle waiting for the truck; indeed, much worse, because cattle have a positive value and are fed, whereas we had only a nuisance value in German eyes. Wait and be pleased that you are allowed to live! Be grateful. But so many of the waiting crowd wanted food, wanted to join their families, to go back to plough their fields, repair their houses, rescue their belongings, and a handful, like ourselves, wanted . . . still to be free. A nice paradox, that we should now be ardently praying to fall into the hands of the Bolsheviks, those Bolsheviks among whom there is no personal freedom of thought nor of enterprise, where man is bound to the machine of the state and where bureaucracy is god; the beginning and end of all things. But through Bolshevik territory we had to pass, if our plan was to succeed. Many had to make their choice; the Germans or the Bolsheviks?—not a pleasant alternative, but, now that we were not allowed to pass, even that choice was not open to us; all that we could choose was between opening or not opening a tin of beef.

Having spent a whole day waiting and watching the German cars and motor cycles passing with their officers and soldiers, we returned to the convent where we had spent the night.

The priest and nuns having given us their blessings and wished us god speed had not expected to see us again and our reception lacked some of yesterday's cordiality. There was, of course, no guarantee that we might not go on like this indefinitely and they could not be expected to feed us night after night when they had only limited supplies for themselves. Marjan, however, had the happy knack of making himself *persona grata*. He told the nuns that he had found a large field of potatoes nearby and that he and I would bring a sack of potatoes and cabbages for the convent the next day, so they had nothing to worry about.

The offer was gratefully accepted and its effect immediate, for to-night's supper was even better than yesterday's. When we were half-way through, in came the young priest back from his reconnoitring. He had been even more unsuccessful than we, because not only did he fail to pass the German sentries, but his cart and horse were commandeered and taken to the other side of the line. He would see them no more. The rest of the evening

was spent in relating our experiences and planning to-morrow's campaign which, from all accounts, looked pretty hopeless.

*Saturday, 30th September*

The only thing, so far, which favoured our escape was the clear, warm weather. Everything else seemed to be against us. It was already two days since we had left Warsaw, and we had made no progress at all, beyond the fact that by bringing some food we had secured lodgings in the convent and so remained near the German lines. In the morning Sister Aniela gave us two large sacks, a hoe and a rake, and thus armed we went this morning to an advanced field quite near the Germans. We stuffed our pockets with the absolute necessities in case we succeeded in evading the vigilance of the sentries. It was, we now knew, no use trying along the main road. They invariably turned you back.

We went down a completely ruined side street towards the railway siding, beyond which was a large field of potatoes and cabbages. Many of the cabbages had already been cut, but there were still a large number left and an untold wealth of potatoes. We crossed a field which was pitted with craters, with here and there a decomposing horse poisoning the air with its stench, and came to the level-crossing. It was guarded by a sentry, but he did not stop the occasional passers-by, being only concerned with the track. There were more German soldiers inside the railway-man's box. Anybody wanting to cross had to approach the sentry, but he stopped no one and answered gaily when spoken to in a kind of Polish.

"Can we dig a few potatoes for our family?" people asked.

"If you like, I have nothing to do with it."

"Our family is very hungry," said one man, venturing on a conversation.

"All right, carry on. I too have a family and understand," answered the soldier, who had less of the stiff military bearing than the majority.

"You speak Polish quite well," one of the women complimented him with a smile.

"That is because I come from East Prussia, from Masuria."

"So you are really Polish like us?" continued the young woman.

"I am not Polish, but my mother was," was the brief answer. He obviously did not want to go on talking as the sergeant was watching from the wooden hut.

We passed on with our sacks hoping for the best.

"Let's cut the cabbages first, because it takes less time," said Marjan. "We will dig the potatoes afterwards."

"Yes, that's a good scheme. While we're digging the potatoes we can get ahead of the others, and perhaps be able to slip into that wood and stay there till dusk," I whispered into Marjan's ear. "It would at least be something. We must get out of this wretched Praga."

In a short time the cabbages were cut and one bag filled, the other we reserved for the potatoes. It was a large field and stretched as far as the little wood, a long way behind the railway line. Besides ourselves there were a number of other diggers, men, women and their children helping them. They would at least have a dinner to-day. We worked hard and slowly our sack filled up. Next to me was a woman busy with her hoe, but being heavy with child she could not bend low, so her little daughter had to pick up her potatoes. She was a child of about five years of age with two little pigtails on either side of her straw-coloured head.

We wiped our faces and stopped for a moment. One of the men, whose sack was nearly full, pointed to the little wood in front of us and said:

"Do you see that house with the red roof just in front of you at the foot of the wood?"

"Yes," said Marjan.

"Well, that's where the Germans say their general, Von Fritsch, was killed by our shells."

"Really, there?"

"Yes, but the strange thing is that our men who were here on the night of the twenty-second, when it was all supposed to have happened, say that there was no shooting at all in this sector."

We gazed towards the house which stood out against the green background of the trees, and suddenly saw four German soldiers



emerge from the wood. At that distance they looked tiny, but grew rapidly as they approached us. They did not appear to be harbouring any friendly intention and motioned us to clear off. People began to be afraid. The younger ones took their half-filled sacks and turned back, bent under their weight, and the women called their children and followed. The soldiers, however, were approaching fast and seemed to be annoyed that some still stayed to put in a few last potatoes. We saw them undoing objects they carried at their belts and the next moment they were hurling hand grenades into the crowd.

There were four loud explosions and four geysers of earth and sand spurted into the air. Splinters flew close by us and we felt the strong blast. I turned my head. Near me lay the pregnant woman, her legs kicking and her dress all soaked in blood. The soldiers motioned with their hands, telling everybody to move off at once. There was nothing else to do. To stop meant a repetition of this savagery. Marjan was already running ahead with the sack of cabbages on his back, and I picked up the other with what potatoes were in it and called to the child to come with me quickly. But she stayed with her mother. Once more we turned round to call her, and as we did so, I plainly saw the German soldiers laughing. It amused them that innocent women and children had to fly in such panic from them. They probably thought themselves heroes. They paid no attention to the woman they had killed, but bent and picked up the sacks of potatoes the people had left.

Yes, that was what we had expected. On the high road, where there were many people to see them and where the Ufa cameramen came to film them, the soldiers made a great show of politeness, but here in the fields there were fewer witnesses and no representatives of the press. The soldiers had been told to clear the field of people and they did. The best proof of that was the pregnant woman lying still in the furrow with her face thrust into her native soil.

On our return to the convent we deposited our sacks with the sister-stewardess, and everybody came to touch what was in them :

really potatoes and cabbages! We ate a well-earned lunch, then took our bags and went to reconnoitre the German lines again. This time we decided to move along parallel to the German trenches, and try to find a spot where they would let us pass. We avoided the main road where there was least chance of our getting through, and by keeping to the side streets and going from one garden to another of the ruined houses we came right up to the German lines. In front of the trenches were barbed-wire entanglements, but in places they were not very elaborate and could be crossed without difficulty. The trenches were still manned, but not very heavily. Most of the soldiers were on the other side of the suburb and some stood chatting to the people. You could see women carrying bedding for them, large pillows and feather blankets, for they saw that they got all the comfort this poor suburb had to offer. They had established themselves in the houses which remained intact and outside them women washed their linen. One German helped a girl to move a heavy laundry basket and he was laying the freshly washed shirts and pants out to dry on the grass in the form of a swastika. The others thought this a brilliant joke. The soldier was very pleased with himself. He did not want to let the girl go and tried to kiss her as she wriggled her shapely body in an effort to escape, while the others looked on and laughed. As calmly as we could we walked towards them pretending that we were going home but a voice shouted:

"Halt! Zurück! Back!" and two sentries made ready to shoot.

We turned back at once and disappeared behind a row of ruined houses. That was not a good omen, but we were undeterred and started again near the great dyke of the Vistula irrigation system. However, we very soon discovered that that was equally hopeless. Sentries were posted along it every three hundred yards and from up there commanded the whole stretch of the meadow as far as one could see. When anybody approached they put their rifles to their shoulders and prepared to shoot.

Marjan was exasperated.

"I knew," he said, "that this would be the fate of our adventure.

It was not the Bolsheviks that I feared most; I knew that we should find our greatest difficulty here."

I tried to encourage him as we sat down for a moment out of sight of the sentries. In the distance lay Warsaw, the outlines of its tall buildings and churches clearly distinguishable, though the damage they had suffered was disguised by distance and the mist. The Prudential building still dominated the picture. It was from here that the German guns had pounded Warsaw and you realized how distinctly they must have been able to see the effects of their work.

"Let us try again, Marjan, don't be downhearted."

"No use trying here, perhaps a little higher up."

"All right."

I felt absolutely determined. Something urged me to keep on trying. We passed two elderly people lamenting that the Germans would not let them go home. They had allowed them to come this way, and now they could not go back to their home, where they had left a little child. The Germans were not to be persuaded. As we did not want to get involved with anybody, we let them go and ourselves turned towards a group of houses standing not far from the German trenches.

"Let's at least see what those houses are like in case we have to spend the night here. It is no use wasting our time and energy in tramping to and from the convent. Better to be on the spot and keep an eye on the situation."

Marjan suggested discarding our bags on the ground that this would make us less conspicuous, but I dissuaded him.

The sun was already well in the west and slanting its rays on to the Vistula when we met a man who owned one of the little houses. Marjan offered him a cigarette.

"Is it at all possible to pass the German lines?" we inquired. "We live on the other side."

"It is rather difficult, but you must try; if you are unsuccessful at one point you may be luckier at another. But if you can't get through you can always come here and spend the night with me."

We thanked him for his friendliness and went on. Striding

over obstacles and barbed wire we neared the prohibited German trench. This time we thought of a new dodge. As I could speak German fairly fluently it was decided that I had a German wife who was expecting a baby and was bringing the local doctor to her. Everything seemed to be working without a hitch. The sentry was willing to listen to our story and—more important—believe it, but he said that they had orders not to allow anybody to pass.

Seeing that he was so far amenable Marjan gave him a cigar, the last he had. He took it and allowed us through. But unfortunately the corporal had noticed the cigar and he pounced on us, demanding one for himself. I had to explain that we had no more. Upon that the corporal got very angry, scoffed at the soldier for taking cigars from Polish scoundrels like us, snatched it from him, and told us to clear off as quickly as we could if we wanted to save our skins. Naturally we did.

We thought that we had missed our only chance, but still undeterred, we approached the line many yards farther on. The sentry was just walking in another direction, his attention taken up by two old women who were approaching along the road. Keeping an eye on the sentry we crept up to the trench. In it were two soldiers sound asleep, their rifles near them. Like shadows we slipped past. We were through the ring.

We bolted into the street and walked on, pretending we had always been on that side. Once past the first line, we thought the rest would be much easier. We were now in enemy-occupied country. We were outside Warsaw.

As quickly as we could, yet without raising suspicion, we pressed on into the suburb of Goclawek. The houses here were not built so close to one another and many of the plots were still vacant. The Germans paid no attention to the people who moved freely to and from their houses. We hurried on and soon came to where the town gradually merged first into smaller farms and then into larger ones. Exultant at having overcome a very difficult hurdle, and feeling that no one would force us back to Warsaw any more now, we walked up to one of the farms. Now my family and I were completely separated: it was as though part of me had been

amputated. A well-dressed gentleman farmer came out to us and received us very politely. We did tell him that we had crossed the German lines, but not what our intentions were. His house had been occupied by the German commander, but he was still allowed to retain one room and he said that the Germans were very exacting, but as far as he was concerned behaved correctly.

"The commander really behaves quite like a civilized person," he assured us. "He allows us to listen to the wireless. But we cannot get out of him what the real position with the Bolsheviks is."

"Perhaps he doesn't know," interrupted Marjan, "and that is why he is decent to you."

"Are they a great nuisance in the farm?"

"They could be worse; really I cannot complain. The requisitions are very stiff, but they have paid me for everything so far. Nearly all their convoys are mechanized and they do not require as much hay as our army did. They have only a few horses here. . . . But here they come!"

The colonel and the first lieutenant were riding dapple grey horses, and looked very smart in the saddle. The cut of their bluish uniforms was perfect. The colonel wore a peaked cap and a monocle, and rode in excellent style. When he saw the farmer he saluted without waiting for his raised hat and *Guten Abend*, which struck us as remarkable. We also raised our hats, but did not say anything.

When they had passed, Marjan turned to the farmer and said, astonished: "He seems an unusually polite man."

"Yes, I told you he is really a gentleman. I think that we are lucky to have him and not one of the other type. We often talk together after meals. He was at Heidelberg and is very proud of it. The younger officers are not half as well educated as he is."

"That is very interesting, please go on."

As we walked along he continued:

"They have their dinner in the dining-room. My wife and I eat separately. Occasionally we meet after dinner and when they have had something to drink and their tongues are a little loosened

they say all sorts of things which are worth noting. But invariably they speak with the utmost contempt of the Black Guard. There must be considerable antagonism between the S.S. and the army. I am quite sure of that."

"Your relations with your Germans do not sound much like war."

"I am quite aware that I have been particularly fortunate; what I hear is going on in other villages is enough to make your hair stand on end."

Seeing us increasing our pace he said: "Where are you going, gentlemen; perhaps I can help you in some way?"

"That's very kind of you. Will this take us to the main road?"

"Yes, if you go straight on you'll come to it. But don't forget that seven o'clock is curfew, and you must not be seen out of doors after that."

We thanked him for his information and company and hurried off towards the forest of Waver, which we had to cross. It was still difficult to believe that we were outside the ring surrounding Warsaw, where thousands of waiting people longed to be. Marjan, who all this time had kept rather silent, now recovered his *joie de vivre* and began talking about food.

"You are really a nuisance, Marjan; we must try to make up for all the time we have lost in waiting, and you will always talk about eating."

"I can't help it when I feel hungry."

I urged him to walk quickly and we hurried on across the country till we came to the circular canal joining the Vistula with the river Bug. It was very beautiful here. We were in a little forest of conifers mixed with white-barked birches and alders; the sun was already far down, the air was pure and the sky bluish with a tinge of rose, which made the little woolly clouds seem very fluffy and light. Occasionally a puff-ball would crack under our feet with a splutter of brown pollen. Here and there we jumped over trenches dug in the golden sand, now empty of all but some old opened tins. There was nothing to disturb you here, nothing to shock you, everything was calm and soothing. The first reminder of war was the outstretched brown-grey body

of a roe, probably killed by shrapnel. We could not understand why it had been left untouched; possibly everybody thought that it had been there a long time.

Some distance farther on we came to a meadow and saw a barefooted girl in a kerchief walking ahead of us crying. She had not been allowed to join her beloved whom the Germans had stopped on the other side. She had come six miles on foot to meet him and was now going back having only glimpsed him from a distance.

From here we could safely turn into the main road, where we should be able to get along quicker. We passed some German stable hands carrying bundles of hay on their shoulders. The majority of the Germans we met, however, were either on bicycles, motor bicycles, or in cars. Practically the only vehicles we saw were German cars moving at a great speed, or else supply lorries, most of them light, some heavy with trailers, looking like huge pantechinons. We passed a blacksmith's shop with three military cars standing outside. While repairs were being made the soldiers stood about chatting. Some of them tried to get the girls to join them, on the pretext of giving them a lift. Time was getting on, we were not more than a few miles on our way and it would very soon be curfew.

"We must get more of a move on. Those forests are full of German soldiers and if they catch us after time in the wood we may get into a fix."

"Certainly, and the sooner we reach some decent shelter the sooner we shall have a meal," agreed Marjan.

"No doubt."

We heard the rattling of a peasant cart behind us and the beat of hoofs on the road. Marjan stopped the cart.

"Give us a lift," he said to the driver.

The peasant looked at us and at my rucksack.

"Where are you going, gentlemen?"

"We're going in your direction, towards Deby Wielkie. We'll pay you."

"Oh, it's not that. But my mare is tired and I am anxious to arrive home before curfew. They caught me on the road and

forced me to carry wood from the forest all day long. I haven't had anything to eat and they did not pay me a penny."

Marjan rolled a cigarette and offered it to the driver, who lit it, pulled his cap down over his eyes, and said:

"I see that you've had a long journey; well, all right, get in."

He whipped up the horse and off we went. A few miles and we would be through the ring of woods surrounding Warsaw. The birds were going to roost and the whole forest was filled with their chattering. On the main road there was less traffic than there had been for the last few weeks. Here and there could still be seen the remains of overturned vehicles and cars, but the Germans had ordered that the roads should be cleared and forced the local peasants to do the work for them unpaid.

To-day being Saturday, our driver thought that the Germans would probably not stop people and put them to work for them.

"Those sons of bitches are such queer fellows; they do all sorts of outrageous things during the week, but they say that they respect Sunday. It's the only day when we can be sure that they will not catch us on the road or in the farm and make us work for them. They don't differentiate, and it's no use objecting. Even if you are ill you must go."

"They don't pay you anything for the work?"

"They don't even give you anything to eat all day long. If they catch you on the road they take you in their damned lorry to a field perhaps five or six miles away. You have to dig potatoes or do some other job for them and when you're done and tired they leave you and you may go home to your missus."

The mare trotted monotonously along, the peasant using his whip from time to time, but drawing across her back rather than actually whipping, and so in friendly talk we came out into a forest clearing. Here came the sound of noisy voices, and we saw two teams of German soldiers playing football.

All this time we had been driving on the extreme edge of the road. I also noticed that all the other carts were keeping religiously to the side, a most unusual thing. Those peasant carts, leisurely rolling along in the middle of our Polish roads, often evoking a curse from passing motorists and causing innumerable accidents,



normally regarded the roads as their domain, but the Germans had cured them of that. Mr. Grzelak explained that it was now punished with confiscation of both horse and cart, so no wonder the roads were kept clear for the occasional German service cars. The heavy lorries used a kind of disc painted red and fixed to a short handle, like a Japanese fan, with which the driver indicated to the users of the road what he wanted them to do. Whenever Mr. Grzelak saw a German car approaching he turned into the ditch and waited till it had disappeared in a trail of dust. It was after six when we approached Milosna and our driver grew restless lest he should have to spend the night away from his farm. The curfew was very strictly enforced.

Only a little hill now separated us from the village. The country was barren here and very sandy with dunes made by the Vistula when it used to flow along here in the olden days. The trees were chiefly pines and small birches, but the landscape was picturesque. On the right slope of the hill was a wooden church very neatly growing out of the sand, its little steeple forming a pointed end to the curving line of the ridge. On the other side were trees interspersed with houses.

Near the edge of the forest we noticed what looked like two aeroplanes, but it was getting dusk and we could not see exactly.

"Those," explained Mr. Grzelak, "are a Polish and a German aeroplane; one fell almost immediately after the other. We shall pass the graves of the airmen a little lower down. From now on you will see many graves. Those of the Germans are decked with flowers and crosses on which are placed their steel helmets or, if they were airmen, their forage caps. Our soldiers' graves have our own steel helmets."

"Were there many Germans killed in this village?"

"I reckon it must be a large number. Many are buried in the wood, and they are all covered with flowers. The mayors have been made personally responsible for providing flowers for the German graves. One mayor has already been arrested, because they said the asters on the graves in his village were not fresh enough."

"So even our flowers must be at their service."

"You did not expect that they would worry about our graves. The village girls bring flowers for our dead too, but many are afraid of the Boches."

"You said that many Germans were killed here?"

"Oh, a hell of a lot, but you will see even more German graves farther on near Minsk Mazowiecki. Here they sent a lorry load of ready-made crosses."

"Did they even bring crosses with them?" asked Marjan surprised.

"Yes, a whole lorry load. All alike, wood painted black and tarred."

We had now reached Milosna, one of those long villages which stretch along the main road with a church at one end and an inn at the other. In normal times it lived more from the traffic than the land, which was very poor here. The inn in Milosna was the favourite place for drivers to stop for a pint of beer and a sausage while their horses were watered. The beer and the well were the chief attractions and few people ever spent the night there. But now it was different.

As we approached it our driver's expression changed and he shook the reins and really used his whip for the first time.

"Why are you suddenly in such a hurry?" asked Marjan.

"This is now a dreadful place."

"You mean the inn?"

"Yes, the inn. Shameless things are going on. The Germans have caught many decent country girls, daughters of respectable farmers. They've beaten them and forced them to strip and dance for the soldiers. The girls are not allowed to leave, but what would be the good even if they did, now that they have been turned into whores. Daughters of respectable farmers you know. The place has been turned into a bawdy house for the soldiers. Everybody is horrified. What an offence before God!"

"Do you really mean that they forced respectable girls?"

"Bless my soul; they caught Mr. Bintok's daughter from our village and have still got her there. The priest tried to get her released but they just slapped his face for him. Even if she came home now, what is the good of a doxy."

The cart was approaching the fork in the road at Zakret, where German sentries stopped everyone, asking them how far they were going and reminding them about the curfew. Those coming from Warsaw had no need of a permit, but all vehicles going towards it had to have a stamped card. The reason for this puzzled me and the only explanation I could find was that the German command did not want to allow people to return to Warsaw once they had left it.

Mr. Grzelak asked us where we would spend the night.

"It would be wise to think about it now. No good getting caught wandering by night. Have you anywhere to sleep?"

We told him that we hadn't, and he invited us to stop at his house where he already had a number of refugees, but we could sleep in his barn. Gratefully we accepted.

It was already getting dark when the mare turned of her own accord into a side road. The road was sandy and led uphill and the mare plodded along slower and slower, the skin creasing on her loins as she stretched her muscles.

"Is it still very far to your farm?" asked Marjan.

"Not more than four hundred yards, you could walk that bit, while she drives up."

We jumped out and a few minutes later entered Mr. Grzelak's house. Inside the one large room, with its low ceiling and clay floor, were his whole family and a number of refugees from Warsaw. On a large bed against the wall was an old peasant woman lying under a red blanket. She was so old that she seemed not even to belong to this age. Her yellow face was all wrinkled, the skin taut on her prominent nose, her eyes sunken. In one old wizened hand she feebly grasped a rosary, while her colourless dry lips mumbled the prayers. Near the bed were a number of children watching granny's rosary or preparing for bed, and nearby was a woman playing with her little son in his cot. The men, most of them middle-aged with big moustaches, sat on benches against the wall. One head was adorned with a magnificent mane of black hair trimmed in front to a fringe; another fine face had beetling eyebrows overshadowing a pair of grey intelligent eyes.

The women were busy with the children, or washing and preparing for Sunday.

The entrance of Mr. Grzelak with two strangers aroused great interest. Even more people came into the room, most of them refugees from various parts of Poland whom Mr. Grzelak allowed to stay in his house and barns. Such is true hospitality. The room was full, the right moment for Marjan to produce a tin of cigarette tobacco and win everybody's sympathy.

"Please help yourselves."

We were offered milk and bread. A real large brown loaf, round and home-made and a crock of milk, which seemed to me more beautiful than any Chardin ever painted. How relative all values are. Here was bread and milk and we could have a glass each, even two. Marjan's tobacco had had its effect.

The Polish peasant is a great politician and whenever he meets strangers likes to hear their news and views, and express his own. At such momentous times as these his liking for politics becomes almost a passion and even the womenfolk here lent an ear to what was being said. The old woman on the bed, on which she had been lying like that for the last twenty years, coughed discreetly, not wanting to interrupt the talk.

We told them what the prospects were for the coming months. "Keep your heads cool, don't let yourselves be befuddled by the German lies."

"What about those allies?" asked one resolute old man as he helped himself to the tobacco.

"Do they really exist? Are they fighting against Germany, or was it only a story our authorities put about to make us fight with more confidence?"

"Of course they will fight," said Marjan with a touch of indignation, for, after all, was he not going to France, that fabulous land of which he had heard, to fight the Germans, to join the Polish Legion which we all felt instinctively, purely instinctively, was being formed there.

Then they started ventilating their grievances against the Germans who had already made themselves most unpleasantly felt

by the whole village. Everybody complained of their merciless confiscations of property and food.

"We brought our belongings and furniture from Zeran in a lorry, which we put in the barn and carefully removed the two front wheels. But do you think that stopped them from taking it?"

"How could they take it then; did you tell them where you had hidden the wheels?"

"Not at all; they chained it to another lorry and hauled it away together with all our belongings. Now we are left with what we stand up in. And we daren't even say a word, otherwise they would have stabbed us with their bayonets."

"They are taking everything, even the copper telegraph wires. When the Russians come here they will find the place absolutely bare."

"Will the Russians come here for certain? Coming from Warsaw we know less than you do."

"I reckon," said one of the peasants, glancing from time to time at the door, "that the Russians are sure to come here. They are, they say, already in Siedlce."

"Certainly," added another, "all the German farmers who have lived here for generations have now gone west. They were selling their property for next to nothing; if only I had had the money I could have bought a lot of useful things and kept them buried until the war was over."

"Did they leave their farms?"

"Yes, they sold what they could and went. They were told that land would be given them on the other side of the Vistula in the German occupied territory."

"In Mladz, Wolka, and other hamlets they went like one man. Isn't it strange? They must have an extraordinary organization. We were accustomed to look on them as natives, but when Hitler gives them the order they obey blindly."

"The worst of all are Jerry press gangs, and the way we are treated as though we weren't even human beings," complained one woman from her corner.

"Yesterday the Shvabs came to our village, rounded us all up,

loaded us on to their lorries and took us three miles away to dig potatoes the whole day. Everybody had to go. The children were left alone."

"Did they take you too?" Marjan asked.

"They did not exempt anybody. Even a solicitor from Warsaw who was among the refugees here had to go and work. They ill-treated little Moses Levy, the cobbler's son, most terribly. He is a cripple. They took a special fancy to him and told him to carry the sacks to the lorry. The boy was too weak to do it, and when they saw him choose a small one, they filled the largest they could find. Two soldiers then lifted it with difficulty and dumped it on his frail shoulders, upon which Moses collapsed under the weight. They would not leave it at that, but kicked him horribly and pulled him up by the hair. When he was on his feet they loaded him again and again he fell, so they went on kicking him with their hobnailed boots till he was left unconscious. It was like watching our Lord falling under his burden."

"Yes," confirmed the other peasants, "they kicked him as if he had no feelings."

Everybody had some accusation to make against the Germans and their merciless behaviour. One of the women bemoaned that her child had died of scarlet fever and that when she went to the German doctor, he wouldn't even speak to her. The funeral was to be in Milosna the next week.

There was such a fog in the room that I was glad when Mr. Grzelak opened the door and led us to the barn, where he showed us a comfortable place on the straw in the loft. Down on the threshing-floor slept the women.

While Marjan went for a walk in the company of a handsome blonde widow, with whom he had been flirting the whole evening, I wrote up my diary, and before going to sleep took an ear of corn from under my rucksack and stuck it between the pages as a souvenir of the night we spent in Mr. Grzelak's farm.

*Sunday, 1st October*

For fifteen shillings Mr. Grzelak agreed to drive us to Minsk Mazowiecki, about ten miles away, on the main road to Siedlce.

As it was Sunday we were fairly safe from commandeering, but, before we left, Mr. Grzelak wanted, as he said, "to consult his nose," not being quite certain how far the Bolsheviks had advanced. Though he was a native of this district and instinctively felt his kinship with it, he did not know the Bolsheviks and did not want to be cut off from his home. As a dog turns its nose into the wind and sniffs, so Mr. Grzelak took a good look round first. He waited till the sun was well above the horizon before he decided that everything was all right and that we could go to Minsk. Marjan's advances must have been agreeable to the vivid blonde widow for she nobly offered to come with us and keep Mr. Grzelak company on the way back. I sat beside the driver and the other two tucked in behind. The brown mare, having had a good feed of oats, trotted quickly downhill and we soon found ourselves on the main road.

"This," said Mr. Grzelak as we passed a charming little village hidden in weeping willows, "is Izabela, an old village called after the squire's wife. There was a fierce fight between Polish and German planes just above those houses. It was a sight. I never saw anything so agile as those planes. You can't imagine how our boys fought. Unfortunately two of our machines crashed in flames and we could not even rescue the pilots. They were burned alive before our eyes."

Far in front of us we saw a German cavalry patrol raising a cloud of dust. Mr. Grzelak slowed down to a walk and all conversation stopped. We plodded along slowly, the wheels rattling on the stones, for about ten minutes till the Germans were right out of sight. We came to two lonely cottages standing on the right; both were thatched and one had a rake on the roof—an invitation to the storks to build a nest. A woman was blubbering loudly on the doorstep and we could hear her repeating: "Cursed brigands! Thieves!"

Mr. Grzelak knew the woman and stopped for a moment.

"You're crying, Mrs. Jontkova, what's wrong?"

The woman mopped her eyes with her apron and, between her sobs, said: "They've just been into my cottage and snatched all our blankets from the beds and taken them, saying that they were

military blankets. Brigands, hooligans!" Poor woman, she was not the only one to be robbed.

The road to Deby Wielkie was flat with a monotonous countryside spreading away on either side, slightly undulating on the left, perfectly flat on the right. In Deby Wielkie itself, a large village, many of the houses were completely burned out. Blackened bricks and protruding chimneys witnessed to the loss of property and happiness. We passed more German graves ablaze with dahlias and asters, graves which will testify to the world that the Germans bought their victory with blood, a lot of blood. The cart jolted on along the uneven road.

"I can see that there has been plenty of bombing here," remarked Marjan, pointing to the many craters with which the fields were studded close to the road.

"The Shvabs unloaded a lot of bombs on the supply columns," said Mr. Grzelak.

"Did you notice that nearly all the craters are very near the road and, while the explosions must have created havoc among the traffic, no bombs have actually fallen on the road itself? The marksmanship is not good. This was an undefended area and yet they missed."

I was of a different opinion. It had struck me that most of the bombs had fallen between one and three hundred feet from the road, consequently they had certainly upset the convoys and taken their toll of life, but possibly the airmen had been instructed not to destroy the road itself, which the Germans expected to use later for their own tanks and lorries.

It was now nearly noon and when Mr. Grzelak stopped at the next farm to water the mare we got out for a moment to stretch our legs. In the farmyard were some hens and a file of geese led by a proud gander which hissed and stretched out its neck when anybody came near. The red combs of the hens bobbed up and down as they pecked and scratched in the ground. Life in the farmyard seemed as peaceful as ever. Suddenly we heard the grinding of a car's brakes and a moment later three German subalterns drove with a toot into the yard blazing away with



their revolvers. The chickens squawked, the geese scurried away with a patter of webbed feet, and the children cowered.

A few accurate shots and a couple of pullets and the proud gander lay in convulsions. One of the Germans collected the "bag," held it head down for a minute to let the blood drain off so as not to stain his uniform, made it into a bundle and bore it off to the car, telling the farmer in broken Polish: "Go to Colonel Beck, and he will pay you."

These mocking words I heard most distinctly.

Minsk Mazowiecki was one of those half-timber, half-brick towns you see in east-central Poland. On the green at the outskirts were large dumps of ammunition which had fallen to the Germans and now had sentries to guard them.

It was time for us to say good-bye to Mr. Grzelak and go on by ourselves. We asked him to stop at the chemist's shop. Marjan exchanged a last warm word with his blonde, we paid our driver, shook hands and entered the chemist's shop, where I asked for aspirins. There were a number of people talking in the shop and from them we got some idea of the local situation. The Germans evidently did not feel comfortably settled in Minsk; the Bolsheviks were in Siedlce and were generally expected to come here. Anybody who wanted to move legally from one locality to another had to go to the central command and ask for a permit. There were crowds of Jews waiting for these all day long. We left the shop, having already gathered quite a crop of news.

The best way of learning what is going on in Minsk, and one which I recommend to any traveller in that part of the country, is to try to buy a hat on Sunday, as we did. In principle the shops are closed, but we soon learned that if we went to the back door of a certain house off the High Street we might be able to get one. A hopeful vendor is always a willing talker and before long we were in possession of all the tittle-tattle of the town.

The Germans had plastered the whole town with little tablets and indicators giving directions how to reach the various formations. A collection of arrows and indicators told any German

soldier where he would find his unit. There were a number of armoured cars stationed in the smaller square. Nowhere did the Germans mix with the population, but we were told that one could buy cigarettes from them for German money. As Marjan was such an inveterate smoker that he would rather forgo anything than a cigarette, and as our supplies were running short, we went to the square to buy some. They were selling a brand of cigarettes called Juno in white packets of six. For one mark, which we handed to a soldier, he brought us two packets from their canteen.

I saw that the soldier had a military gazette and asked him to allow me to glance through it, which he willingly did. The intellectual level of the gazette was appalling, but my attention was caught by the statement that the Bolsheviki were withdrawing east, and the two invaders coming to terms at a conference between von Ribbentrop and Molotoff, terms which would finally divide Poland between them. The news was dreadful, but when you have just escaped from one horror, even the greatest tragedy gets no further than the surface of your mind. Besides, heaven alone knew what the truth was. From what we had seen it appeared rather that the Germans were preparing to move out. At any rate they had behaved with great restraint in the town and popular gossip expected the Russians any time.

We did find out what we wanted to know. The Bolsheviki really were already in Siedlce. People had even seen the Red army.

"No difference, I tell you," said one enterprising man with piercing eyes and a black moustache, "the same soldiers, the same expressions, the same officers, the same inefficiency which we knew in the Imperial Tsarist Army. No change except that the cut of the uniforms is different."

We now knew about as much as we wanted to know (but had not yet bought a hat) and it was time for us to be going. We entered the large cobbled market square, with its twin steepled Vistula-Gothic church and a number of booths in the middle, some of which traded even on Sunday. Our request for cheap spoons met with a deluge of offers and about half-a-dozen little Jewish

boys came running with them. We only needed two. Having bought two pounds of pears and stowed them in my rucksack we went, Marjan very disappointed because I definitely refused to waste any more time on buying meat and other provisions. Money had its full value in the market, though the prices were about twenty per cent. higher than before the war. We were told that the best way to Siedlce would be along the railway line.

"You'll be safe," an old railwayman assured us. "No one will stop you."

A German lance-corporal was standing beside the level-crossing eating an apple.

## CHAPTER IX

### IN NO MAN'S LAND

THE railway track from Minsk Mazowiecki to Siedlce was like a boulevard, crowded with little parties of men and women, small groups of railwaymen and postmen walking along it in either direction. The day was warm and cloudless and people's faces reflected a little happiness and no immediate fear for the future.

"There are no Germans here! No Germans here," was the refrain as we passed along. As it happened Marjan and I were ahead of the wave of civilians who had been through the ordeal of the siege. These people here had left Warsaw and the western towns before the Germans came and did not yet know what had happened to their towns, their homes and their businesses. It was still uncertain whether they were going to be under the Germans or the Bolsheviks. Here they were in no man's land. The German zone ended abruptly at Minsk, while the Russians were said to be still several leagues east somewhere near Siedlce, a report which we were anxious to verify. The two "friendly" armies thought it safer to keep a wide strip of country between them. We did not know how deep it was, and felt that we had better cross it quickly while the two armies were on the move and the frontiers still undetermined. We calculated that the Russians would advance farther west and that even if we waited here we should ultimately come up against them, but we felt that the farther east we meet them the better.

It was already about half-past two and Marjan could only think of food. I had to put up with a frightful tirade. I had "crushed his scheme" of buying meat in the market place where it could be had, and he refused to be starved to death. A handful of pears did not soothe him, and this time our bully beef was in serious danger, which I only succeeded in averting at the eleventh hour.

From the passing people we learned that though there was no abundance of food in the district, it could be had in the surrounding villages, the nearest of which was Micnia where there was a well-known sanatorium, recently turned into a military hospital. We were told that fast walking would take us there in about an hour. The track was really like a club, everybody talked to everybody; people going east were persuaded to turn round and go west; people returning west were persuaded to stay for a time where they were. You could see Polish soldiers, unarmed, but moving freely about; some people were even in white flannels enjoying an enforced and prolonged holiday in the country. True, various battles had been waged in the district, but when they were going on the people had sheltered in the forests and the German aeroplanes, which had been omnipresent during September, had concentrated chiefly on the lines of communication and principal settlements. Meanwhile, those who were here with their families waiting for things to settle down, went for a walk along the railway just as a matter of course. It was so pleasant not to have to meet any Germans. It was, as it were, the last breath of freedom.

Farther away from the town we met fewer people, but they too were just strolling along the line. No trains could be run because the track had been damaged in several places and there was no one to repair it, for the land belonged to no one. The Polish authorities no longer functioned and neither the Germans nor the Russians had yet arrived. And still life went on; money preserved its purchasing power, and some vestige of order prevailed. There were no police, no laws, no courts. How great is human inertia, how powerful are old customs and routine!

Some people still walked beside the track remembering the penalty for trespassing on the line. A party of railwaymen came up on a hand-trolley and getting off left the trolley and went away to buy bread and vegetables. The idea occurred to Marjan and I simultaneously to get hold of the trolley—then we should get on much quicker. It was an ordinary railway trolley with a handle to move to and fro, rather old and partly out of order, its trailing wheel rubbed against the boards and acted as a brake, but it went and so we dumped our bags on it, sat down near the crank and

started propelling. Anyhow this was much faster than walking and Marjan was ready for any sacrifice which would bring lunch nearer.

Our way led through Mrozy and Kotun to Siedlce. The trolley groaned and creaked from lack of oil and we smiled gaily at the little parties of people we passed. Seeing us riding so merrily the children wanted to come with us; a railway trolley always has a great attraction for them, and whenever we had such uninvited passengers we made them do the pushing from the back and so increased our speed. Their presence was especially welcome when, owing to broken rails, we had to lift the trolley from one track to another.

We very soon reached a village with a row of gray-thatched cottages, and while Marjan stayed with the precious vehicle, I went reconnoitring for food. I entered the first cottage which looked hospitable. Inside was a peasant woman with two flax-haired boys exactly like each other, both two years old, both hungry, and sitting with spoons in their hands on boxes at each end of a kitchen stool which served them as a table. The two tots ate from one wooden plate and were obviously enjoying their little meal of potatoes. I presumed that they were the woman's children, but she told me that they were orphans from the neighbouring village of Lekawica, where the Germans had executed 43 men, the entire male population, because the Polish army had erected a barricade there to prevent their tanks from passing. At the moment the village was completely deserted, because the women had taken to the forest. These two boys were the only living creatures found in Lekawica.

As Marjan was waiting with the trolley I did not want to enter into long conversations with the peasants. I used Marjan's trick of placing cigarettes on the table and so got one of the farm hands to fetch Marjan and to look after our precious trolley while we had something to eat. The peasant woman made us a whole dish of potatoes with lard and a few scrambled eggs and I also asked her to do us hard boiled eggs to take with us. How extraordinarily rich are the country villages. Although two armies had passed through them in so short a time, they could still provide us with

eggs, milk and bread. Marjan recovered his usual good humour and was ready to listen to all the grievances and complaints of those peasants. The news that we came from Warsaw spread like lightning and the room filled with peasant heads, heads like wood-carvings—shapely noses, long hair, well-designed foreheads, but, above all, those deep-set blue eyes. These peasants of Poland constituted the very life blood of the country. Their attachment to the land, their love of nature, of our birds, our forests and fields, their grief when they heard of the destruction of Warsaw (which many of them had not even seen) showed their affectionate love for their country. The Germans had showed their cruellest side and many of the peasants had had their homes searched and most of their belongings confiscated, yet they preserved their sense of proportion. They knew that whatever they had suffered, what Warsaw had undergone was worse. How many of us town-dwellers imagine, when something has gone wrong with us, that everything else pales into insignificance beside it?

A village in the neighbourhood, Ceglow, was lamenting the loss of four boys whom the Germans had executed for no other reason than anger at the routing of a detachment of theirs by Polish lancers nearby. But worst of all was the suffering of the people of Kaluszyń, where practically the whole village had been levelled to the ground and burned. There had been some sharp fighting near the town and when the Germans entered it they decided to take vengeance on the population and also indulge in an anti-Jewish terrorism. Most of the houses in the Jewish part were set ablaze, and machine-guns posted outside them to prevent the inhabitants from leaving and not withdrawn till they were already unconscious in the flames. The Christian population of the adjacent Ceglow were superior beings in the eyes of the German officers and so had the honour of better treatment. They were invited to leave their houses and watch while the Germans set fire to them one by one. One woman who attempted to rescue some of her belongings was shot dead on her door-step. We were assured that these reports were absolutely true and they were, in fact, confirmed from various independent sources later on.

There were tears in the eyes of the women as they told us end-

less tales of the German cruelties. Marjan and I tried to comfort them as much as we could by telling them to trust in our Allies and in the future of the country, but it was really unnecessary, because they were as undaunted as ourselves, and it was we who could take courage from their views about the future. None of them thought for a moment that the enemy would stay long in the country.

I looked at my watch and saw that we had already been more than an hour in the cottage. We thanked our hostess for all her hospitality and she, refusing to accept any money, gave us a bottle of milk which she said we should appreciate on our way. As it happened we did not appreciate it, because Marjan broke it while repairing the trailing wheel of our trolley, thus once more proving his theory that it was always safer to store food directly in the stomach than to carry it about in bottles or tins.

Refreshed by a good meal we had now plenty of strength to keep the trolley going and clattered along past signalmen's huts, fields, woods and little stations. The rhythmical rowing movement as we pushed the rod forwards and backwards kept us very warm. I can recommend a few hours of railway-trolleying to anybody who seriously thinks of a slimming cure. It will certainly work.

So we covered more than twenty miles, passing from time to time disabled locomotives, or portions of trains composed of a few carriages or trucks, over which children swarmed, playing passengers and ticket-collectors. The permanent way was becoming damaged and we had to move our heavy trolley from one track to another much more frequently, which naturally reduced our rate of progress. We were getting into the battle zone and approaching the fields of Aeldama, the scene of the carnage of a few weeks ago.

The ditches on either side of the railway line were littered with quantities of military equipment and innumerable files of abortive army orders and typed instructions for officers. The enemy must have broken up some divisional or brigade headquarters. Thousands of soldiers' letters, most of them scrawled in pencil, were lying in the dust between the sleepers and destined never to



reach the anxious mothers, sweethearts, wives and children for whom they were meant. I picked some up and read them. They were hastily written and exposure had caused the ink to fade or run. Instinctively I looked for Felix's handwriting. Perhaps he had been on one of these trains.

I never imagined that preparing for a battle was such an extremely minute and complicated job necessitating the preparation of thousands, if not tens of thousands of standardized sheets of instructions for officers and subalterns. And to think that one unexpected move on the part of the enemy had made all this work completely useless and necessitated an entirely new set of orders.

I do not know why, but I felt that the enemy must have scored a great success here in these plains between Mrozy, Kaluszyn and Siedlce. It was the end of the enveloping movement round Warsaw. Hundreds of Polish rifle butts were scattered along the railway line and even regimental badges and officers' stripes, probably torn off because they were afraid of being caught as officers. Many of these badges were of the Gendarmes, which did not surprise me, as I had always been told that the Gendarmes were the greatest cowards in the army. Their yellow and orange badges caught our attention several times. Perhaps they had been wise to tear them off. After all, why should they prejudice their chances of escape? But to us, the sight of these abandoned relics of our country's pride was most unpleasant; but so was all our defeat. This was part of it. And beside these epaulettes and letters, were hundreds of empty cigarette packets—the familiar German Junos. The Germans discarded their empty cigarette boxes, our soldiers their equipment and epaulettes. Can you imagine how it feels?

We kept to the right-hand track as the left was more and more frequently occupied by stationary trucks, locomotives and carriages. As we approached the town of Mrozy the individual carriages became whole trains standing close to one another. Fortunately for us the track we were on was completely free. Hence it could be inferred that all those trucks had been moving in the direction of Warsaw, but had been stopped between Siedlce and Minsk unable to reach their destination. Perhaps they were troop trains. But we had no time to stop and inspect them. We reckoned that

we should be somewhere near Siedlce by dusk, which would enable us to enter the town under cover of night, if circumstances and the Bolsheviks allowed. Somebody told us that the Germans had attacked our division from Ceglow and that these smashed trains were the result.

We "rowed" hard and our trolley droned monotonously. Umph, umph, umph. We came to Mrozy, a small township now completely burned. Round the station the town looked just like parts of Grochow, or the garden city of Staszyc in Warsaw—entirely consumed by fire. I think that part of the station building had escaped the flames. It was here that, like all pleasant things in the world, our comfortable progress by trolley came to an abrupt end. A party of eight Polish airmen suddenly surrounded the trolley. They were eight, and we were two. So they went by trolley while we continued *per pedes Apostolorum*, our protests cut short by the tentative offer of "one in the gizzard." I discovered a little later what they wanted the trolley for. There was some petrol left in one of the dumps and the airmen probably had some machines in the coppice from which they emerged and were no doubt planning to fly to Roumania or some other neutral country. Anyway the result was that we had to walk and that destroyed any chance we had of reaching Siedlce to-day.

Walking, one always sees things in greater detail. Our way led us past innumerable railway trucks. Trains and trains of ammunition and other military stores stood there one after another separated by a locomotive or two. Enormous must be the amount of material required by an army! Ammunition, ambulance wagons, fodder (already partly pilfered by the local peasants), lorries with pontoons, iron poles and bars, even horse-shoes—and everything in huge quantities. Now all this booty was waiting for somebody to come and take it. Who was it going to be, the Germans or the Bolsheviks? Marjan was horrified when I entered one of the wagons and came out with a hand grenade in my hand—he thought that I had pulled out the pin, which I should never dream of doing. Some of the trains had nothing but shells for the big guns, each one beautifully packed with wood shavings or cork and straw. The smaller shells reminded me of bottles of

wine in their rush covers. There were also trucks with enormous projectiles the heads of which were covered with some white substance; probably they were tracer shells. None, of course, had fuse caps fitted.

Stopping as little as possible, we walked on past wagon after wagon for two or three hours, till Marjan suddenly announced that he was hungry and, without dinner, would go no farther. There was nothing for it but to turn into the heavily timbered village of Skruda and ask for hospitality. In the first cottage we entered there were two children down with scarlet fever, and the cottagers directed us elsewhere. An obliging young peasant of enormous stature took us to a cottage at the edge of the village. On the way he told us that there had been a tremendous battle there lasting several days. Our troops had been supported by an armoured train, which was now lying smashed just outside the station. Its guns had destroyed a great number of German tanks, some of which were still in the mud of the pond and marshes nearby. He showed us one of them. The Germans had already removed any that were movable. We also saw some of our whipper tanks that had been put out of action. There had been a great artillery duel and the Germans had attacked from the east and north-east. Our young peasant had seen the battle in progress and told us that the German troops had come up in lorries, preceded by tanks and armoured cars. They had left their lorries at the end of the road and had spread over the fields in no time, charging against our machine guns and artillery. The attack he had seen was successfully repulsed and the number of German dead was large. The Germans renewed their attack several times, and each time were repulsed by our infantry and the fire from guns of the armoured train, but in the end we had had to retreat before their superior numbers and air force. Both Marjan and I were extremely anxious to see the armoured train before dusk, and after a meal in a hospitable cottage, where we had a little rest while we talked with the peasants and their family, we returned to the railway line to continue our journey to Siedlce.

The armoured train, composed of two heavily-plated engines and a number of armoured trucks carrying machine-guns and

4-inch guns, was standing just outside Skruda. It was all dazzle-painted and now stood immobilized between innumerable trains at either end. In the wagons which carried the guns we found a large supply of unused ammunition, but not being a gunner I could not say whether the vital parts of the guns were missing or destroyed. There was something powerful about this train, but at the same time something rather unwieldy. I am not a military expert and have no business to talk about armoured trains, but whenever I read about them it strikes me as strange that such a mass of iron moving only on rails can be used in modern warfare, which I always took to be a question of manœuvre. Perhaps an armoured train behind a line of strong fortifications where it can intensify the fire at any point desired, has its justification, but certainly not in the mobile warfare which had ravaged Poland.

We spent more time looking at the armoured train than we could really spare and had to hurry on. After all we were not sight-seeing. We still did not know the exact situation as regards the Bolsheviks and as things moved at such lightning speed we could not afford to dawdle. But we were both very tired and it would have been unwise to embark upon a most difficult part of our journey, that of entering Bolshevik territory, in a state of exhaustion. So, after going on a bit farther and knowing that we were still some 15 miles from Siedlce, we boarded one of the trucks, an ambulance car, well-padded with straw bedding.

We covered ourselves with the rug and, snuggling close to one another, rested until six o'clock in the morning. The blanket was most useful after all.

*Monday, 2nd October*

The rosy morning found us already pressing on along the track after a breakfast of four hard-boiled eggs and some pears to fill in the corners. Occasionally we passed men and women searching the wagons for food and clothing. Food there was none, but plenty of soldiers' clothes—pants, shirts, and forage caps could be had by raking the trucks. Out of every carriage came ragged figures with their booty. Like ants which will devour a body until only the bare clean bones are left, the inhabitants of the

surrounding villages were stripping the trains of everything of value, leaving only the ammunition and purely military equipment. Much had already been taken in this way, but many wagons were still full. We saw a number of large tank-trucks containing petrol and oil. There were hundreds of thousands of gallons stored in those tanks. Marjan encouraged the peasants to take whatever they could:

"Carry on, supply yourself with petrol and naphtha for the winter. There is going to be a hard winter and you will be glad to have it. You can store it, bury it and no one will find it."

The peasants were only too glad to and required but little encouragement. The owner of one mill arrived with a cartload of empty barrels to carry off as much oil for his flour mill as his horse could pull home.

"There is more paraffin oil at the back of this train," shouted Marjan, inviting the peasants to plunder. His generous nature rejoiced at the sight of this pilfering. Few people, however, wanted the petrol, which was of less use for their oil engines or for heating.

"Take it, gentlemen," Marjan invited them. "The petrol must not go to the enemy." There was little response.

"We cannot leave full tanks like that. The stuff is too valuable to the Germans," said I, turning the large tap on the side of a huge container. "Let's at least fill my lighter." It was as good an excuse as any, and I put my lighter to the cascade of petrol. "Now let's wash our hands," added Marjan.

And so we walked along the track unscrewing the taps of each tank in the line one by one. We were wilfully squandering the precious liquid for which the nations were fighting, that very stuff which we knew the enemy needed. We left the whole train simply spurting petrol. It was the last revenge we could take; it was the pleasure of destruction, and you can't imagine how much satisfaction it gave me to do it. Now that I think quietly about the number of gallons which we wasted, I believe it must go well into six figures.

Near Kotun there were far fewer trucks and carriages, only one here and there, instead of those monotonous rows. In front of

us was a level-crossing, which was the cause of a little skirmish. I took out the map and saw that the shortest way to Siedlce was along the railway line, while Marjan wanted to go by the main road, thinking that we might get a lift. The divergence of opinion was happily composed and I agreed to turn off. Scarcely had we done so when Marjan was already sitting in a cart drawn by quite a good horse. A few cigarettes had won for us the driver and there we were jogging along towards Brozskow, only five miles from Siedlce but still in no man's land.

The high road was something of a change after nearly twenty-four hours on the railway line. Round Siedlce is rich agricultural country and the little villages we passed seemed peaceful and prosperous. Their cottagers knew nothing of the horrors of Warsaw, though many had not been far from the quickly moving scene of war, which had come near here towards the end of the second week of September. Of course, the sound of bombs and the drone of German planes were familiar to every village in Poland, yet the enemy had not yet ridden roughshod over these rich fields. This was the real old Polish countryside.

We had only gone some three or four miles when our horse cast a shoe and we had to stop at the nearest blacksmith's forge.

Marjan would not waste his time:

"An excellent chance to buy something to eat."

A few minutes later he went to the village and returned with half a yard of sausage and a parcel of meat.

"But where are we going to cook that meat, Marjan? I am not going to wait."

But Marjan already had a scheme; he had arranged with the local midwife for her to cook the meat for him.

"But why go to the midwife?"

"Because hers was the nearest house and midwives are quick at doing things."

It was a good idea and, indeed, before the blacksmith had finished, we had already had our meal. As we were going back to the cart we met a farmer with his five-year-old son. They both wore steel helmets, which they had picked up somewhere in the fields, and we could not help laughing, because in them they looked

like a big mushroom and a small mushroom. The boy's head was completely sunk in the helmet, which covered his eyes, and his father had to lead him by the hand.

The blacksmith told us how difficult it was to get nails for shoeing the horses.

"You are short of nails!" exclaimed Marjan. "Friend, we have just passed a whole truck full of nails and spikes. There are enough to last you for fifty years; go and get some before the Russians take them."

Our cart took us some five miles past Broszkow, where we got out and continued our tramp towards the Bolsheviki. We had to be very careful and ask our way before moving. The roads were not too crowded, but every now and then we could see strange looking people—unshaven, dirty, untidy, but yet not looking like peasants. They were in town clothes, in trench-coats, carried rucksacks on their backs and appeared more like town hikers on Sunday than men or women belonging to the countryside. Of course they were not peasants; they were people from the towns, some going towards the Bolsheviki and some away from them. They were civil servants, bankers, clerks, teachers, who thought they had disguised themselves as ordinary country folk or tramps. However, they had not been long enough on the roads to rub all the town off them and I very easily recognized several people I knew from the University. One, who had not shaved for at least a week, was a bank manager from Brest Litovsk and a friend of Zula. Having met him, I soon found myself surrounded by his party all looking like himself and delighted to meet someone who had news from Warsaw. Most of them were sun-tanned and in excellent health, having spent a month camping. In return for our information we wanted to know about Siedlce.

"Do the Bolsheviki allow you to enter into the territory they occupy?"

"Can we go to Siedlce?"

The answers were extremely contradictory. "They will let you." "They will not." "They don't allow anybody to enter Siedlce." In such circumstances the best policy was to proceed slowly and carefully and see for ourselves. We were now on the main road,

only three miles from Siedlce and already 60 miles east of Warsaw. What a small fraction of our whole journey! How terribly far still from freedom! We had yet to meet the second invader. Then there was the whole of his occupied territory to cross and then. . . . But it wasn't wise to think so far ahead, while we still had such obstacles to overcome here. Let's do the first things first.

We could sense that the Bolsheviks were very near, if only from the little clusters of people who came as far as this and then turned back. Some could not make up their minds whether they preferred to be with the Bolsheviks or with the Germans. The majority knew that by staying where they were, in no man's land, they left their future to the chance of fortune.

We kept going on and questioned anyone we thought might be able to give us any information about Siedlce. The best people to ask were railwaymen, whose information, I had discovered, was usually the most reliable. There were many railwaymen in uniform on the road, most of them evacuated from the western provinces, but there was a spirit of real brotherhood among them and they told each other what they had seen. One of them came from the province of Pomorze and had retreated by way of the bigger towns of Grudziadz and Torun. He told us that they were occupied by the Germans, but that very little damage had been done to them by either side. We also heard that in Bydgoszcz at the beginning of the war the German minority began sniping Polish soldiers from the windows before the army had retreated, and that many of them had been executed. They were, of course, organized saboteurs. In Bydgoszcz, from all I heard, there must have been a great slaughter of the civilian population, because the Germans found ready excuses for executing many Polish patriots. But some German civilians lost their lives too. How many nobody will ever know, but no doubt Dr. Goebbels will multiply it tenfold to prove what barbarians we Poles are.

We could already see the spire of the parish church of Siedlce, which is a large market town and the seat of the county administration.

Siedlce—the Bolsheviks! I looked at the clock. It was just ten.



Probably soon after noon, if everything goes all right, we should see the Bolsheviks. But there was no use in hurrying; it was so easy to make a slip. So, questioning continually, we made our way forward.

On our left were a few houses. We went into one and asked for milk, but unfortunately it was not to be had in the village, which was sheltering a children's school from Siedlce and they absorbed all the local supplies. A young blonde woman who looked after the children informed us that the Bolsheviks had their outposts just outside the town.

## CHAPTER X

### UNDER THE HAMMER AND SICKLE

THE great question was whether to approach the town along the main road or along the railway line. It may sound far fetched, but it was a problem, and as, unlike Count Cagliostro, we could not enter Siedlce through all the city gates at once, we had to decide. The roads parted at this point and we did not want to stop. Where were the chances greatest that they would let us pass unmolested?

An aged peasant woman with a face wrinkled like an old apple was just coming along the railway line lamenting that the Bolsheviks would not let her into Siedlce.

"They did not let you pass?" asked Marjan.

"No, they did not," and she sighed deeply.

"Did you speak to the Soviet sentries?"

"No, I did not see them."

"Then how do you know that they won't allow you to pass?"

"Another woman said so."

"Deuce take you, you old harridan," said Marjan under his breath.

That sort of thing was absolutely no use to us. What we wanted was first-hand knowledge from people who had spoken to the Bolsheviks, and the fact that these were rather few and far between tended to show that there were ways of penetrating inside the ring. On the whole we heard few stories of cruel treatment or barbarous behaviour by the Bolsheviks. Those who had come in contact with them spoke of their incompetence and bad clothes, but nearly all said that there was nothing to fear, because the Bolsheviks themselves claimed to have come to Poland on a kind of mission and with no intention of doing any injury. They had come to Siedlce to protect the population from the Germans and

would occupy the whole country up to the Vistula and liberate it from the German terror.

We knew very well what to think about these professions, but reports of that kind were encouraging. After careful reconnoitring and innumerable questions we decided on the railway line; first, because we thought that the situation on the track was better known and, secondly, because as no trains or anything were running there was less chance of pedestrians attracting the attention of the sentries. We very soon discovered that there were several other people using the track and going in the same direction. The permanent way was littered all over and apparently had not been cleaned since the beginning of the war. On both sides of the line were thick bushes and in front of us, on the left, a brook which ran into a largish pond. We heard people saying to each other :

"It isn't wise to go along the track, better keep to the ditch on the left."

"Let's not move in such big clumps, only in groups of two or three."

We were approaching the little brook which cut through the fields and marshy coppices in a silvery ribbon that stretched as far as the eyes could reach. The sun was already high and, though it was October, had still enough warmth to make the water look attractive and inviting, especially as we were carrying rucksacks.

"It can't be very far. Surely we are nearly at the eastern end of this no man's land. We should see them any moment now."

As I thought this I noticed three men bathing in the pond, while their companions looked on laughing and shouting. We looked. No, is it possible? Could they be our soldiers?

Yes, they were Polish soldiers who were bathing so gaily, snorting and spluttering in the water. Those on the bank gave us reassuring signs to come on and not be afraid. I could not understand this at all. Were we not at the end of the unoccupied country, three-quarters of a mile from Siedlce, which was in the hands of the Bolshevik army, the invincible proletarian army? How could Polish soldiers be bathing within gunshot of the enemy outposts? It was as though French soldiers were to bathe a few hundred yards from the Siegfried Line.

A minute later the mystery was solved, and in a way which, I must admit, I never expected. Only two of the bathers were Polish, the third was a Russian. He was posted somewhere near the little river and the warm weather made it so tempting. He had left his post, undressed, given his rifle and uniform to the other Polish soldiers to take care of and plunged in to enjoy himself. I could never imagine a German soldier doing such a thing, and with Poles too.

We crossed a footbridge and carried on for five minutes, walking in the ditch beside the line, then on top of the embankment I saw a Bolshevik soldier with a rifle under his arm. We looked at each other in surprise. That Russian was half-soldier, half-civilian in those shabby clothes. No coat, an old ragged cap, a dirty blouse, patched black trousers, only that furious-looking rifle with the bayonet on the top to confirm his identity. But to be surprised is not a privilege allowed to those who cross the Soviet frontier; you must take everything for granted. He gave us friendly signs to pass on the other side of the track and allowed us to come near.

"Zdrastvoyte tovarich!" Marjan greeted him in Russian. "How do you do, tovarich," answered the half-beggar in the friendliest way, and so we began to talk. He was the advance Russian outpost and told us that we could go quite safely to Siedlce. He was very talkative like all the others we were to meet later on that day; a tall Russian peasant with rather protruding cheek-bones and penetrating but unintelligent eyes. There was, however, one unpleasant thing about him which shortened our conversation—he was extremely dirty and emitted a most disagreeable odour, as people will who never clean either their clothes or their bodies. Marjan offered him a cigarette but he refused it and lit one of his own instead, which I thought rather strange behaviour for a sentry on duty. But as I decided not to be surprised at anything I might see, I thought that probably the regulations allowed it. After all we were now under the rule of the Proletarian Army, which had different standards from those in other countries. The other people who passed tried to pander to the sentry and I saw a young woman offering him a red flower, which

he pinned to his blouse. Rather charming, though scarcely very martial.

Our further progress into Bolshevik territory proved just as easy. It was exactly 11.40 a.m. when we crossed the line. But where was Marjan? I turned round and saw him far behind me. He had found a companion, a young blonde with two pigtailed hanging from under her beret. They were talking as if they had known each other for some time.

Hallo! It was the girl whom we had met an hour or so ago in that house with the evacuated children. I must admit that Marjan had a genius for making friends in record time, and the right friends too. The girl was very handsome, though rather pale, and what was more important, she came from Siedlce, to which she was now returning. She invited us both to stop and rest at her house, where she had a wireless, if it had not been confiscated during her temporary absence. She explained that the town had been occupied before by the Germans, but that they had retreated west before the Russians. The Germans had bombed the town and damaged part of the railway station, but fortunately only about forty to fifty houses had been destroyed.

Under the pleasant guidance of Miss Wanda, we soon found ourselves among the ugly stockades and wooden fences in the suburbs of Siedlce. Just outside one of the fences was a machine-gun standing all by itself without anybody to look after it. Where were its crew? Again I was told not to ask such silly questions. The crew was thirsty, and when one is thirsty isn't it natural to go to the well a few hundred yards away and have a drink? And where there is a well there are girls, and where there are girls there is an opportunity for a laugh and a little fun in trying to understand each other's language. So they went half-an-hour ago, left their gun and enjoyed themselves. The gun had no feet and could not escape—why then worry? It would wait for them.

We went a little farther and at the entrance to a farmhouse we found an anti-tank gun standing ready for action except for the fact that there was only one soldier to work it and no ammunition. But the gun was there, we passed close to it. The design and the make of the gun seemed to me excellent. It was on rubber

tyres, very thick perhaps, but looking extremely good and new. We were allowed to touch the gun, a thing civilians would not be allowed to do in Poland.

From what I had seen of the Russians so far I thought they were more like people in a story than a modern army, and they all looked so terribly shabby and dirty. On further acquaintance the Russian army was exactly as I had imagined it from my father's descriptions of the old imperial army. They looked like an assembly of kindly beggars, except that they were on the whole young and gay. In the distance we could hear the music of accordions and harmonicas coming from a camp in the park. They played the romantic Cossack songs born on the banks of the Volga. Some other soldiers were singing as they waited for their dinner round the smoking field kitchens. The camps looked extremely dirty and sanitary arrangements were evidently regarded as unnecessary.

On the main road we passed a number of Russian lorries, unwieldy things which took up the whole width of the street. These lorries had powerful engines which probably consumed a large quantity of petrol. Some of them had Diesel engines. We all wondered why they made all their equipment so heavy. Again I must stress that the quality of it seemed good, but it was the unwieldiness of everything which astonished me all the time.

One's surprise when one first comes in contact with the Bolsheviks is, indeed, continuous. From now on I shall record only facts and leave the surprise, if any, to the reader.

The large lorries of which by now we had probably passed more than eight, were almost empty, each carrying a handful of soldiers. On each rifle was fixed a bayonet, which in the Soviet army is scarcely ever removed from the barrel. Even when off duty the soldiers leave their rifles with the bayonets fixed. Their shabby clothes, more like sacks than uniforms, were mostly of a brown-grey colour, though there were other shades as well. The soldiers gazed with interest at the people, and nearly all their faces wore a friendly, rather childlike expression. Those primitive peasant countenances, with their surprised eyes, veiled with a kindly naïve smile whatever doubts they might have entertained

about the world in which they found themselves and which clearly they did not understand. That is what we saw all the time, whether they were riding in lorries or marching along out of step and looking tired and lazy and as if they did not care about anything. There was something human and sympathetic about these men and at the same time something tragic, something entirely hopeless and fatalistic. They might just as well have been in China or in Britain, and still they would not have known why they were there, why they had been taken away from their wives, their children and their homes.

We were now in the town proper, not far from the railway station. From time to time we saw men of the Soviet militia which had been formed out of the local inhabitants. They had red armbands and some carried arms. On the whole they had only minor jobs, as I knew from having already had some experience of the organization and running of such guards. A large proportion of the Red militiamen were recruited from the Jewish population, no doubt partly owing to political sympathy, but also partly as a reaction after the short-lived Nazi occupation of the town. Their attitude to the civilian population was correct. While in Siedlce I asked several of them for information and was always given an answer, even though I spoke Polish, while the militiamen although not very fluent in Russian, showed a preference for the latter. The young generation of Eastern Poland does not speak Russian very well, never having learned it at school.

Up to Pilsudski Street I did not see much sign of damage at all, and this long street also seemed intact. We did not go farther because this was where Miss Wanda's house was. She occupied four rooms on the first floor and here we met her aunt and a school teacher, a man of unusual intelligence. Having watched the behaviour of the Russians ever since they came to Siedlce he explained their method of conquest as that of an ideological crusade based on bayonets to liberate the population from some supposedly unwanted régime. In the case of Poland the excuse was extremely facile, as the country was endangered by a foreign conquest. The Bolsheviks always modified their arguments according to whom they wanted to persuade. They liberated the Poles from the

Germans, the Jews from the Nazis and the Polish anti-Semites, and the peasants from the alleged oppression of the landlords. To the rich peasants they promised more land, to the Ukrainians the fulfilment of their nationalist ambitions, to the patriots the destruction of the Germanic Empire—in other words, like Father Christmas, they had something pleasant for everybody. They told their own soldiers that they were fervently desired in Poland and that they were on a mission. Judging by their rags, they might have been missionaries all right, except for their inferior intelligence, inferior at any rate compared with that of the people of central Poland. The Russian troops were followed by a massed propaganda, joyous and vehement. In some cases the propaganda even preceded them, and local militias on the pattern of 1920 were formed spontaneously by the population. This applied less to central than to eastern Poland. In order not to alienate the sympathies of the people a very careful watch was kept on the soldiers to prevent looting and other forms of abuse only too common when an army is on the move. It must be placed to the credit of the political commissars that such an army did not loot and steal. (Really, in this respect something astounding had been achieved.) And not only did they not steal, but, as a general rule, they did not take bribes and far from accepting gifts, shared with the natives whenever they had something to give away—which happened very seldom.

The intellectual atmosphere created by this long account of the Bolsheviks was suddenly dispersed by Marjan's prosaic question:

"Do you think that it would be possible for us to have a wash?"

"Of course, as soon as the kettle boils."

We washed in the bedroom. Oh, it is pleasant to wash one's feet after a long walk. Inside the beds were pictures and other valuables Miss Wanda had put there to hide them from the enemy.

Marjan gave Miss Wanda's aunt the remainder of our meat as we did not wish to denude their stores, though judging by the large round loaf of brown bread which was placed on the table, food was not too scarce. Marjan was so delighted with his young hostess that after lunch he gave her his seal cap, and when she



tried it on, she really looked most charming with a fringe of golden hair showing beneath the black fur. I only wondered what he was going to wear himself, as he could not go bare-headed. But, whatever his sentiments, Marjan remained practical and he obtained an old peaked cap which was found in a wardrobe. He was very pleased with the exchange, because, as he said, he looked too rich in his fur cap; and to appear well-dressed and clean was to call attention to oneself, and that possibly meant trouble.

We wanted to go to the station and see if there was any hope of getting a train. Marjan, of course, was tired, and preferred to stay with Miss Wanda and keep her company on the couch. He was enjoying his siesta so much that I had to "be an angel" and went out alone to see what I could find out and have a look at things in the town. At the door I met two Bolshevik soldiers coming out of a cobbler's shop. When they had gone I exchanged a few words with the cobbler:

"Do they pay you for your work?"

"Oh yes, they pay me quite well. They always try to pay in roubles first, but I only take Polish money. I have never had any trouble about their paying."

"What did you do for them?"

"I mended a boot for one of them while they waited."

"Were they friends that they waited for each other?" I asked, because I had noticed that they had separated as soon as they left the shop.

"I don't think they were," answered the man.

"Then why did they wait for each other?"

"That is in accordance with the regulations."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it is really very simple. The Russian soldiers are not allowed to enter any private house singly; when they have any business to do they must go at least in twos."

It sounded strange. "Why?"

"To prevent them from committing any mischief. When they are in twos, one is supervising the other. It is a kind of check. It works quite well. Moreover some of the soldiers tried to escape

by buying civilian clothes and changing their rags in private flats. This makes it much more difficult."

"I see. Everything has its reason, as you put it."

In the street a little Jewish boy was selling cigarettes. A good idea. We shall no doubt need some. There were none to be had in the countryside and they were always useful to give the peasants for various little services. I therefore bought a hundred. He had only the very worst "Machorka" cigarettes of the Polish Tobacco Monopoly at the very high price of a penny each. I handed the boy a note, but he had not enough change so I took all he had and told him to bring me the rest at the station. He was an honest little hawker and brought me my change a few minutes later. The little sum was in Russian currency, which I accepted out of interest to see their coins. The authorities had fixed the rate of exchange at one rouble to the zloty, which, compared with the pre-war rate, very much over-valued the rouble.

While I was still talking to the boy, round the corner of the street rode a Russian cavalryman on a dapple-bay mount with a long light mane and a very long untrimmed tail. He seemed much better dressed than the soldiers I had seen so far, but as I did not yet know how to distinguish their ranks I was not sure whether he was an officer. He wore a long riding coat, a cap with a green top, had a rifle slung across his shoulder, and in his hand held a long whip like a knout, which made him look very ferocious from the distance. From under his unpeaked cap protruded a thick tuft of curly hair. I thought he was a Cossack. He rode towards us and stopped:

"What is the time?" he asked; a strange question, considering that there was a clock on the station tower just in front of him. I looked at my watch and compared it with the clock.

"It's half-past four now," said I politely.

The rider smacked his lips, but that did not seem to be all he wanted.

"Tovarich, would you like to sell your watch?"

I was so overwhelmed that I did not answer at once.

"I'll pay you very well for your watch. I have the money; I'll pay you in roubles."

I looked at the little cigarette vendor.

"I'll give you four pounds for your watch, in Polish money if you like. All right?"

He was serious and really wanted to buy my watch, even without looking at it. The little boy came to my rescue.

"No, this tovarich does not want to sell his watch, but go to the market square, perhaps they still have some in the watch-maker's shop."

The soldier gaped at both of us disappointed, whipped his horse and went in the direction indicated. I stared at the boy.

"They pester us all day long with their offers to buy watches. They will buy any rubbish and pay very high prices for them. My father has sold them a good many old watches for which he got marvellous prices. The Russian soldiers are very keen buyers of such things. Obviously watches are not to be had in Russia or else the price must be very high. They search for them all day long."

He was right. The gaping Russians besieged all the shops, buying every kind of luxury article, but chiefly trinkets and watches. By now there were no more watches in the shops, but they were equally eager buyers of scents, soaps and sweets. Strange things for soldiers to buy. I even saw them going in their twos and threes into drapers' shops and coming out with parcels, which they immediately unwrapped and showed each other the ladies' knickers, stockings, or jumpers they had bought, laughing and joking as they inspected their purchases. You got the impression that they were surprised that such things could really be bought in shops, as if shops were something strange.

At the station no one was able to give me any information, not only about the chances of a train leaving, but even as to whether any trains were being run in the whole of the Russian occupied territory. Bolshevik railway officials and Polish railwaymen were working side by side, but no regular services had yet been organized. From an old Polish ticket collector I learned that the Russians were moving some engines and damaged trucks

and carriages east and that if we were lucky we could go with one of these trains to Czeremcha. They were not run for the public nor was there any time-table, but we could try. With this news I returned immediately to Marjan.

Much to his sorrow his flirtation with Miss Wanda had to be interrupted and we all three hurried off to the railway station. On the way we passed a number of heavy lorries with soldiers. With the bayonets on their rifles the whole load looked like a hedge-hog with its spikes out. This heavy Russian steam-roller was a remarkable contrast to the mobile German vehicles. It was the revolutionary steam-roller. We saw quite a number of horse-drawn vehicles and even guns. The army was thus partly horse-drawn and partly motorized. It had too many horses to be called mechanized, and too much mechanical equipment to be horsed. Cavalry regiments were prominent. Another characteristic was the great size of the supply columns and convoys.

At the railway station were gangs of workers repairing the sidings and main lines which had been badly damaged by the German bombs. The work was progressing fast and a very friendly atmosphere of complete informality prevailed among the Polish workmen and Soviet officials. It amused us to see those Polish workmen in their old clothes but wearing the round caps of the Soviet railwaymen. Their Sovietization was as yet only very superficial. They laughed and jested, but all the same were getting on well with their job. At that speed the track would soon be ready to cope with increased traffic.

Confusion began higher up the hierarchy, in the office of the stationmaster. He was a Russian, but left all the real decisions to the Polish staff. I could not imagine the Germans running things in that way and I was often told how, in the last war, they had immediately replaced all local authorities by their own personnel. An assembled train of damaged rolling stock had departed some time ago, but we were told that there would possibly be another, because there were still too many carriages in the station. So, as usual, we had to wait.

This word "wait" has the utmost importance when one is under Russian rule. *Wait* is the answer given to people, *wait* is the

answer people expect from the officials. In this country of planning the idea of doing anything in advance is distasteful and unnecessary. "Wait, wait!" is the panacea in all countries where the individual does not count. Admitted, of course, that it was an occupied country, where naturally you would not expect perfectly printed time-tables.

The wagons that had been assembled stood in a siding and we settled ourselves in the corner of a cattle truck. Naturally we had no tickets, like everybody else we were supposed to be "going home," but that was not the trouble. The question was, would the train go. Miss Wanda, who had come to see us off, now went home and we settled down to wait as patiently as we could. Anything might happen.

There is one good thing about waiting—you can always write up your diary and look around. I was watching a group of Russian workers belonging to the railway Stakhanov movement, shock-troop workers. They stood round an engine which they were supposed to be repairing. If, however, you imagine that they did anything, you are completely mistaken. With tools in their hands they just stood and talked. One man was moving about. He was repairing the locomotive. At any rate, he was the only one doing anything. All the others were watching him and commenting on what he was doing. They argued; they showed each other what should have been done, but no one else moved a finger to help. And how could they when their comrade had just opened a fresh packet of cigarettes and offered them all round. He threw the packet away. There are twenty cigarettes in these packets, so there must have been twenty of them—one working and nineteen doing nothing.

A small engine started shunting our truck and we began to believe that a train was being formed which would take us east. It was obviously worth while waiting, for, however slow the train, we should get farther than by walking. Time seemed to drag. We talked to various railwaymen, all of whom spoke with the utmost contempt of the Bolshevik officials, who displayed complete ignorance of the essentials of railway management. A fireman who had just arrived from Volkowysk told us a very

interesting piece of news. He had yesterday seen posters displayed in the streets in which the Russian authorities warned the population not to dispense with their air-raid shelters as they might still be needed. They warned the people against aeroplanes flying high, telling them that whenever they saw any flying low they need not be afraid because they were friendly, but if they were flying high they ought to take to their shelters because they were enemy, British planes.

"You mean German," corrected Marjan. "How could they speak of British planes?"

The fireman pulled his grey moustaches angrily and said: "When I say British, I do not mean German. It clearly said on the announcements that they warned us against the British."

"Oh, I am sorry, I did not want to offend you," said Marjan. But the railwayman was not to be soothed and he called over two others to confirm that they had seen posters in four languages, Russian, White-Ruthenian, Polish and Jewish, warning people against the British.

This gave us something to think about while waiting for the engine. It was all a little confusing and—what was one to think?

"Is Britain at war with Russia?"

"That sounds strange."

"It could happen, but so soon?"

"I always thought that the Russian policy was to see the Allies and the Germans at war and then to strike a blow at the winner who would have been bled white by the prolonged war," continued Marjan.

"The only explanation I can offer is this. The Russians still fear the Germans, but pretending that they have made friends with them, cannot openly warn the people against them. They can, however, warn them against the British. They tell them to hide when aeroplanes are seen flying high. That is right, the explanation added to it is entirely immaterial."

"Yes, you may be right. And this also adds to people's confusion. They don't really know what the policy of Russia is."

"Ah, those treacherous Bolshies. If their other services worked

as well as their propaganda, they would be the greatest nation in the world."

Here the conversation ended. The train was assembled, and slowly stumbling over the joints in the rails it rolled away north-eastwards. We shut the large sliding door of the truck and were plunged in semi-darkness.

*Tuesday, 3rd October*

Jolting and clattering over the mended track the train proceeded slowly towards Czeremcha. We crept under our blanket and pretended to sleep. It was still quite dark when we arrived, and, getting out, we saw another train, this time really looking like a passenger one, and as it had an engine at the eastern end, we decided to chance it. We quickly boarded a coach and after about half-a-dozen whistles it moved off very slowly. We entered a compartment marked 2nd class, but all the soft seats were missing, having been taken by the local population to make into mattresses. Only the springs were left. It was very chilly and we moved into the neighbouring compartment which was pleasantly warm as it had an improvised stove standing in the middle of it. Fuel was getting short, so at the next station I got out and collected all the bits of wood I could find. The train started when I was still putting wood into the compartment, but, as we had enough to last us to the next stop, I jumped in and left the rest. I noticed that my seat was numbered "13," a good omen for the future. Our plan was to get to Vilna and there see what to do next. It was a queer experience for a confirmed reader of *The Times* and other dailies to be completely cut off from newspapers. We were utterly ignorant of the situation. Whereas in normal times the range of my information stretched from China to Peru, I now did not know what was going on within three miles of me. Two thoughts occupied my mind: one, a fervent hope that the Allies would not make a separate peace with the invaders; the other, that perhaps by now they had achieved some real successes, which had resulted in that order to shelter from British aeroplanes. Who knew what the position really was? Did the little Baltic states still exist? We were aiming there. In Vilna we should be able to learn something.

With us in the carriage were two railway conductors. They talked about the days now gone of free Poland. Seeing that we were Poles they said:

"Aren't these horrible times we are living in? To be servants to such barbarians, such ignorant people!"

"I was in the express trains; will they now have such smart trains?" and, pointing to the torn seats and the cut curtains and the dirt in the carriage, he added:

"It is like a pigsty; not the good old Polish carriages, so clean and comfortable."

The conversation did not go very far as we felt rather sleepy.

It was morning when I opened my eyes again. Over every little station we came to flew the Soviet flag, and at each were militiamen, with red armbands, on duty. They did not seem to have anything special to do, but the authorities had to find them jobs and posting them outside the stations was as good as anything. We were, however, a little apprehensive of these guards, imagining what they would be like in those stations where we had intentions not exactly within the compass of the Soviet regulations.

It was half-past eight by my watch when we reached Volkowysk. We had made good progress, having travelled more than ninety miles north-east in the last twelve hours. There were great troop movements here and it was clear that we should have to wait a long time. Volkowysk seemed to be an assembly point for troops for the west. The town itself was two miles from the station, a relic of the old Tsarist-Russian habit of building stations miles away from towns, not out of a spirit of contrariness, but so as to allow room for the possible growth of the town during the next century. The idea was that the railway station attracted the town to itself and so made it grow. Acting on this or any other theory, they built the stations miles from the towns and so made life much more difficult for the people. The only bus for the town had already left with a full load, but we decided, anyhow, not to leave the station. If we sat there quietly we should certainly attract less attention than walking about a strange town, where the rules about reporting to the G.P.U. police were already



in full force. We were not prepared at this stage to take any risks, and certainly the tourist attractions of Volkowysk could not counter-balance them. The railway station provided quite enough sights of its own.

Now that we were among the Bolsheviks it was of the utmost importance to merge ourselves into our surroundings, to try and look like everybody else and not attract attention in any way. The Bolshevik soldiers, mostly of peasant stock, are ignorant, but at the same time interested and surprised by anything strange they see. The slightest trifle may arouse their curiosity if it departs in any way from the average. We had neither to be too silent, nor too talkative; we must not speak better Russian than the people in this part, nor must we speak it worse. In other words we had to practise the virtue so highly extolled in this society of conformity. The first things to put right were our watches, as we have not done it before in Siedlce. Here they had Moscow time, which was two hours ahead of Central European time. With a turn of the hand morning was changed into noon and we had two hours less to wait. Anyhow that was something. Marjan took definite exception to my writing anything in my diary, as he said it might attract the attention of the political commissars who every now and then strolled through the large station hall, which was filled with passengers and soldiers, Russian and Polish, going home. So I shall have to rely on my memory.

Then it occurred to me that I might write in the lavatory, which naively enough I thought would guarantee a certain amount of privacy. That was a complete illusion, because the partitions had all been removed and the place changed into a communal observatory, which somehow induced an extreme talkativeness and friendliness among the stream of soldiers who came and went. Their caps and uniforms were of any imaginable colour, and I saw some who were better dressed and cleaner looking than those I had seen so far.

The military commander of the station contrived to provide a constant supply of hot water for tea, an achievement in itself and very useful indeed. For this purpose an old boiler like a samovar had been installed on the platform from which free hot water

could be obtained. But to expect everything to be regular would indeed be too much. I very soon discovered that the tap for the hot water bore the inscription "cold," while that for the cold was labelled "hot." Everybody noticed it, but no one bothered to change it.

I rejoined Marjan in our corner of the third class refreshment room, where the atmosphere among the Russian soldiers was very gay. One of them put on a white kitchen cap and helped the buffet girls to pour out tea. This was an excellent excuse for trying to steal a kiss from the not too unwilling girl, to the great merriment of the others. He was a young, handsome soldier with beautiful even ivory teeth, which he showed each time he smiled. The others interrupted him all the time by going up to the buffet for tea. The girl, however, was shrewd, and most carefully collected the money for the teas. Sugar, which she kept in a tin box, was only available for officers' teas. Everybody else had to do without it.

I passed some soldiers gazing at the old posters advertising our Polish spas, Krynica and Zakopane. They stared at the text, but not knowing the Latin alphabet they stopped me and asked me to read it, which I did. When I had finished, one, more intelligent looking than the others, inquired whether these posters had been put there for propaganda purposes.

"For propaganda?" I said. "Why?"

"Does anybody go to the spas?"

"Anybody who has the money and the time."

He looked at me as if he did not believe it, and asked:

"But the workers are not admitted, isn't that so?"

"You are wrong, everybody is admitted who pay for it."

He still did not feel convinced, but let the matter rest.

The Russian soldiers are keen to mix with everybody who will talk to them. They ask endless questions and are never tired of talking. Their food is extremely simple: black bread, boiled beans, and potatoes and meat, which was all beef from cattle commandeered from the larger estates. Forks in many cases are unknown and they eat with their hands, biting off chunks of meat. I have seen a number of these primitive peasant soldiers with

bristly unshaved faces dissolving chocolate in their tea in order to sweeten it. They bought the chocolate in the local shops or got it from the Polish soldiers in exchange for cigarettes or matches. Matches were the only genuinely Russian product which they brought with them, everything else came from the local stores, even the cigarettes they smoked. I never asked how much pay an ordinary private received, but they seemed fairly well supplied with money. They bought bread and butter in the station where it was very expensive, a slice of brown bread and butter being about four times the price of a glass of tea.

Under the tuition of a jocular Russian Marjan and I learned to distinguish different ranks in their army. The warrant officers have little enamelled triangles on their collars, while the officers have squares, and staff commanders rectangles. From the distance all ranks look very much the same. Our teacher was very glad to be able to give us this lesson; they are all keen to tell you about themselves and about Russia in general. And they are really sincere. The trouble begins when it comes to their knowledge of other countries.

After a very long conversation with a lively subaltern who came from Kazan we passed on to the subject of education; the young soldier told us that we should not talk politics because we did not understand them, and he continued:

"In Russia we are now learning chemistry and physics at school, so we really know what to think of things." And he boastingly added: "We have a marvellous education."

To this Marjan answered: "But we have taught chemistry and physics in every secondary school in Poland for donkey's years."

The soldier pursed his lips and condescendingly retorted: "It is different physics, I am sure."

A clean-shaven, square-shouldered officer came into the hall with a red triangular badge on his sleeve. He looked much more cleanly dressed than the others and much better fed.

"That is a political commissar," explained our instructor.

We did not require that explanation, the fact was only too obvious from the frosty atmosphere which suddenly descended on the room. The hitherto so free and easy soldiers became

reserved and silent. However, the commissar soon left the room and the spirit of informality returned. At one of the tables sat a little group of Polish soldiers on their way to their homes and some Soviet privates and platoon commanders. They behaved as if they were great friends, smoking each other's cigarettes. The Polish soldiers were telling about the Germans, whom nearly all the Russians hated. We heard many most uncomplimentary remarks passed about them by the Bolshevik soldiers and even officers. Some even went so far as to say that they would fight them. But when one of the more enterprising Poles asked: "Why then did your Stalin make a pact with the Germans?" he was told, "Comrade, these are matters of higher policy which you cannot grasp. Both you and I are too stupid to understand them."

"Speak for yourself," said the Pole. "Why should we be too stupid to understand them? Everything can be properly explained."

"You have a bourgeois mind, tovarich."

"I am a plain and simple worker, that's all," the Pole answered.

Through the hall passed a woman-officer, dressed in a brown uniform, long coat, high boots and a woollen helmet. Her appearance was really smart, though her face was rather plain and pitted by smallpox. Lined up outside on one of the platforms was a detachment of fifty girl-soldiers, all dressed like herself and really clean-looking. They were ordinary soldiers, had rifles and wore trousers. Scarcely any of them were handsome, but their bearing was good.

Next to us in the hall sat a woman with her son. She was dressed as a peasant woman but did not look one. Surely she belonged either to the intellectual class or to the landed gentry? She was extremely reserved and tried not to attract attention. Some local merchants and their children wore opulent furs and fur caps though it was not cold during the day. Near Marjan sat a thin little woman who kept watching us all the time. There was a hint of friendliness in her expression and in the twinkling of an eye she had started a conversation with Marjan.

"You are officers, gentlemen?" she whispered to Marjan, who shook his head.

"I know you are, but I am a patriot; please don't be afraid."

We were both scared that she might be an agent of the G.P.U. and most firmly assured the lady that we did not belong to the Polish army. But she did not seem convinced, indeed the more we assured her the more she insisted. But we soon found out that she was not harbouring any evil designs towards us—on the contrary she was willing to help us with the trains and to get through Lida, where there was a Soviet control station. She was the wife of a railway official. We had no choice but to avail ourselves of her services, though I must say I had my heart in my throat all the time.

With her I went to some nearby houses beyond the railway line, where I tried to buy sunflower seeds, the chewing gum of less advanced communities. Everybody had pocketsful of the seeds and spat the husks to right and left. Spitting seems in general to be held in high esteem among soldiers. The hospitable gardener gave us a large sunflower which we seeded and so secured a good supply for offering people with whom we wanted to talk. A handful of sunflower seeds serves the same purpose as an offer of cigarettes. This is the local tradition, and is just as native to these eastern regions as their language which here becomes broader, more melodious and less clipped than in the central provinces.

It would have looked suspicious if we had bought tickets to Lida. Anyway there were hundreds of Polish soldiers and peasants travelling home without them and when the collector asked them for their tickets they invariably answered: "We have no money. We're going home."

At about six o'clock (Moscow time) we were in a real train, this time with a mixed crowd of Soviet soldiers, Polish soldiers and peasants, and small hawkers. The train moved slowly, but we were progressing towards our goal, which was the only thing that mattered. The lady, Mrs. Sadzewicz, who lived in Lida, was in the same carriage, which consisted of one compartment divided by benches. People, children, quacking ducks and squawking chickens in baskets all travelled packed together, some standing, some sitting. It was still daylight and we could see the stations, each with red flags, made from old Polish ones by cutting off

the white strip and leaving only the red. Near Ros I noticed a large number of little peasant carts standing in a field beside some pits loading potatoes. Someone in the carriage explained that the potatoes, belonging to a large estate, were being divided among the peasants under the supervision of the red militia.

It was late when we reached Lida, about eleven, and we now began to appreciate Mrs. Sadzewicz, for she invited us to come for the night to her house.

"You might be stopped if they found you in the street. We still have the curfew here. Like all Russian regulations it is not applied strictly and it is all right for us local people to disregard it, but you might get into trouble if you were unlucky enough to be stopped by the G.P.U. police."

So, after having made inquiries about the trains to Vilna in the morning, we walked off with her. From the main road came the sound of heavy motors and the earth sighed under the burden of tractors.

"Could you tell us what is that continuous noise we can hear?" asked Marjan.

"Yes. Because of that awful roar we cannot sleep at nights. The Bolsheviks are moving tanks and armoured cars northwards along the road from Baranowicze. It seems as if they were hurrying them towards the Lithuanian frontier. But don't ask me why, because I don't know."

Mrs. Sadzewicz proved to be a very hospitable hostess. At home she introduced us to her two daughters, both school girls.

"You can be quite sure of my two girls, they know how to hold their tongues. Here with the Bolsheviks everyone has to be very careful. You cannot even rely on some of the neighbours. They have Bolshevik sympathies and might report that you stayed here."

The girls, who had not seen their mother for more than a day, were excited at her arrival with two strangers, whom she insisted on introducing as Polish officers. By now we had decided that it was a form of patriotic obsession with her and that she liked to feel that she was sheltering officers. During a very good dinner the two girls, who had been to their new school for the

first time that day, told us all their impressions. The younger one, who was plump and vivacious and had eyes like stars, did most of the talking; the older girl, who was just on the point of being grown up, was shy and only corrected her sister from time to time.

"Mummy, we are going to have six hours a week of Russian, and no scripture lessons except for those girls who bring written authorizations from their parents."

"Really?"

"Yes, mummy. Mr. Kocur is going to teach us Russian. He started to-day, but some of the girls corrected him; his pronunciation is so funny. He said that he had not used Russian for twenty years."

"Mr. Kocur will teach Russian?" asked Mrs. Sadzewicz.

"Yes, he was our Polish master, now he will also teach Russian."

"Have you any home work to prepare?"

"None for to-morrow, because the proper lessons have not begun yet. There is a shortage of exercise-books and we had no paper to write on. There seemed to be a general mess."

"What did you do the whole morning?"

"The headmaster, the same one as last year, spoke to us about the new school discipline."

"Don't forget to tell mummy what he said about the British aeroplanes," interposed the elder sister, eyeing us all the time from under her long eyelashes.

"Yes, yes, of course," went on the younger.

"Don't interrupt me Regina, I'll tell mummy all about it. The teacher read us a warning against British aeroplanes. They fly high, and according to the paper they might drop bombs on us, so the Russians say, and we must hide."

"We have heard that," said Marjan, "but we don't believe that our allies would drop bombs on us anyhow, even if it were true that they were at war with Russia."

"But something must be brewing," said Mrs. Sadzewicz, pouring out the tea, because we have noticed here that several of their mechanized divisions are being moved north. That could not be against the Germans. It sounds ridiculous, but it looks

as if they were moving their troops against Lithuania and Latvia, somewhere up that way."

Neither Marjan nor I even twitched an eyebrow, but if it were true, that spoiled our plans. With a concentration of troops in the north, how were we going to cross the frontier up there?

Mrs. Sadzewicz put two large spoonfuls of strawberry jam into each of our glasses of Russian tea. It was a mark of special favour. Normally in those regions people drink their glasses of tea with one spoonful of jam. It sweetens the tea and gives it flavour. In the east of Poland people like their food sweet and each respectable household has jars and jars of jams and jelly.

We did not talk long after dinner. The wireless was slightly out of order, otherwise we should have listened to the news from London, which Mrs. Sadzewicz thought the most informative of all since the Polish station at Warsaw had closed down. She told us that some of the leading citizens of Lida had been arrested by the Bolsheviks and imprisoned without trial.

As we had to catch the train early we thought that we ought to rest. The flat was very small. Mrs. Sadzewicz gave us her bed in the living-room and slept in the kitchen, while the two girls slept in the other bed in our room. The light was put out and two little figures in long white nightgowns slipped under the thick quilt. The younger girl tossed all night and when I woke up early in the morning I noticed a pair of shining eyes blinking furtively out from under the cover.

*Wednesday, 4th October*

Our hostess did us two further good turns. She gave Marjan her late husband's railwayman's peaked cap with its badge, and she took us in the morning across the line to meet the train at a railway crossing which was not open to the public, but which made our way much shorter. The presence of a woman made our party look more local and homely and deprived it (as always) of any appearance of "being up to something." Marjan had caught a slight cold and was coughing, but it did not seem very serious. In his cap he looked the perfect railwayman; he really did. Only his bag still preserved a trace of the old Marjan.



When we arrived at the station we saw a very symptomatic picture. The arrival of wounded Bolshevik soldiers. Wounded soldiers! Well, that meant that there had been fighting somewhere. Surely there must be places where the Poles were still resisting, still in arms. So it was not altogether a walk-over; our resistance not just a fairy story. These few soldiers with their Soviet nurses were a reality no one could deny. However, there were not many of them and they were soon taken away to the Lida hospital.

While Marjan was asking a fellow-railwayman about the trains to Vilna, I was stopped by a Russian sergeant who looked like a cow at my rucksack and asked me whether it was an army one. I naturally insisted that it was a *doroshnie* (tourist) sack, nothing to do with the army. He stared at it, obviously never having seen a rucksack before. I did not like this excessive interest in my luggage, but could do nothing about it, especially as he soon called another soldier and they both examined it, as though it were something suspicious.

"Why does it hang on the back if it is a travelling bag?" was the naïve question.

"To make it easier to carry."

He insisted that all travelling bags should be borne on the shoulders, and inundated me with further questions.

"What are all these straps for?"

"It's the first time that I have seen a travelling sack with straps and pockets," said another. The situation might have developed in an entirely undesirable way had it not been for Marjan returning with Mrs. Sadzewicz. They made a joke of the whole matter:

"Don't you see that he is not quite all there to carry his sack on straps?" they said, pointing to their foreheads.

"He is touched, he insists on having his belongings attached to himself, like a tortoise carrying its house," and they began to laugh. The two soldiers stared for a few more minutes without any expression on their lethargic faces, then their faces broadened into stupid slow smiles. We were saved.

Between the time the train came in and its departure was a long interval, during which it was searched by the military police.

Lida is a control point where the Polish soldiers are removed from the trains, none being allowed to go on to Vilna.

We were in a compartment occupied entirely by civilians. There were no Russian soldiers in it, but as soon as the search began at one end of the train several Polish soldiers fell into our compartment and asked to be sheltered. Two of them slipped under the benches beside the hot water pipes, while another locked himself in the w.c. The people did their best to hide them; women covered them up with skirts and baskets, and even the little babies tossed about in their mothers' arms, making an excellent screen. The poor boys under the benches must have been nearly stifled and excessively hot. Suddenly the door opened.

A Russian soldier appeared with fixed bayonet and gazed in goggle-eyed.

"Is anybody hiding here?"

Naturally no one answered.

"Are there any rabbits (deserters) in this compartment?"

One of the women said: "Only we are here."

"Only?"

"Yes, only," answered a whole chorus.

"Let me see then whether there are no deserters," said the soldier, clumsily trying to get into the compartment.

His long rifle impeded him, and having the bayonet on it did not improve matters. However, he did get in and made his way, complacently smiling and tripping on everybody's feet, to another compartment.

The soldier in the w.c. was not so fortunate as those under the benches. Unfortunately there was only room for one under each. Those who had been discovered were marched off under armed guard. Bad luck!

When the search was over and the train had started moving, soldiers emerged from under practically every bench and breathed again. Those in our compartment, their faces like chimney sweeps, begged for civilian trousers. Could anybody spare them civilian trousers? Everything else could be done easily; buttons cut off, tapes unfastened, belts thrown away, but the trousers. A man searched his bag and found an old pair which he gave to one

of them. The private slipped them on over his service trousers and the metamorphosis of a soldier into a civilian was achieved.

"Why don't you remove your old trousers before putting on your civilian ones?" asked an old Jew.

"My army trousers are still very strong; my mother will dye them for me."

At the next station a peasant got in with a basket of onions and several chickens in a cage. As he was putting the basket on the upper rack the chickens deposited their droppings on the Jew's black coat. He made a terrific row and, with a hearty "Deuce take them birds," the peasant seized hold of a sack and began rubbing the unfortunate coat, making an even worse splash. This occasioned general merriment and somebody suggested that the Jew should be compensated with a few onions. This Solomon's judgment was finally accepted and the matter dissolved in a general conversation in that delightfully melodious Polish of the north-eastern provinces.

"Are you taking all these goods to Vilna to the market?" asked a young woman.

"Yes, I hope to sell them in town. I am only anxious whether I shall be able to buy the things I want in the shops. If not, there is not much point in selling my chickens; I might as well keep them on the farm."

"Naturally."

Goods were getting scarcer and long queues, we were told, stood outside most shops. Consequently the peasants refrained from supplying the town and the Soviet authorities were faced with some nice economic problems. There was a large passing Russian army which had to be catered for and moreover the town was overcrowded with refugees from western Poland. We had been told that no strangers were allowed to stop there without a permit from the G.P.U. police and that all newcomers had to report to them immediately under a severe penalty. The Bolsheviks had devised a system which they thought would satisfy the peasants coming in with their goods. All sellers of farm produce, butter, eggs, fowls, and other things, had to obtain a receipt from the purchaser to show that they had sold that produce. Holders

of these receipts were promised preferential treatment in the shops. The system, however, was a complete flop and, as their money had no purchasing power over industrial commodities, the peasants abstained from supplying the market. The Russians only provided the shops with matches and the former sources of industrial goods in western Poland were now completely cut off. Vilna itself does not produce much and its only important industry is wireless sets. The laws of economics are merciless, and so simple: no supplies, no goods, high prices.

The train stopped at the clean little station of Jaszuny. A red flag fluttered on the white station building nestling in front of fields green with winter corn and shaded by trees.

"Jaszuny," announced the Jew.

"Jaszuny station," echoed the old peasant. "The large estate and the fish ponds are several miles from here."

"There is not much of the fish-culture left," added another peasant. "I was there only the other day. Well, they have drained the ponds and collected all the fish, both large carp and small fry. Mr. Balinski, the squire, used to be very proud of his carp. They were known all over Vilna. Now even the breeding stock is destroyed. The peasants divided the whole lot among themselves, and not one thought of closing the sluices.

"How silly!"

"Yes, they destroyed everything. When the Bolshevik commissar arrived he was very much annoyed to find all that destroyed."

"He probably was not such a fool as those greedy thieves."

"I heard," said the Jew, "that he made a speech to the peasants, telling them that they should not kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. But everybody shifted the blame on to everybody else and they never found out who did it."

"The Soviet militias formed by the local communists have done more harm than the Bolsheviks themselves," added a woman.

"Some fools even erected triumphal arches to receive the Bolshevik soldiers, but they were very soon disappointed."

"Why?" asked somebody.

"Why?" said several indignant peasant voices. "Because when they came they promised us so many things. They told us that

our farms would be enlarged, that they would give everybody cows and horses, that there would be plenty of sugar and candles and paraffin oil for our lamps. And all they did was to grab estates. Afterwards nothing more was done for the poor people. On the contrary, confiscations have already started."

"They promised the poorer peasants free clothing and new boots. Really new boots!" screamed an irascible little peasant.

"Yes?"

"Some people went in their worst rags, almost naked, to greet the Soviet army, hoping to rouse their pity and receive good clothes. But all they saw was that the Bolshevik soldiers were just as badly dressed as themselves."

"Tfu," spat a peasant in the corner of the carriage. "How can they give you anything? They haven't got anything themselves. That's my opinion."

"Where are all these things they promised?"

"Some of the poorer farmers, the lickspittles, who joined the Red militia don't want to go on with it any more. It takes up their time and they don't get anything out of it. You must live you know. Your children want milk and food. You cannot exist on promises."

I did not hear any more. The train was entering the suburbs of Vilna and on our right was an aerodrome, where I could dimly see dark green Soviet planes with stars painted on the wings.

The station was crowded with people and soldiers were coming and going, but I do not remember noticing any disarmed Polish soldiers, of whom I had seen large numbers at other smaller stations. Those in our train, for instance, had jumped out at various stops before Vilna. When the collector asked me for my ticket, Marjan, who was wearing his railwayman's cap, said in a patronizing tone:

"This man is with me; it's all right": and I was allowed to pass the turnstile.

We now had to make definite plans and lay them very carefully. First we needed information and so went to the paper kiosk. There were no serious Moscow papers to be had, no *Pravda*, no *Izvestia*. The only fresh paper sold was the locally published

*White-Ruthenian Pravda*. We bought a copy and retired to the waiting room to read it, but this was so crowded with Soviet troops and so stuffy that we had to leave. The walls of the station were covered with posters bearing a picture of Marshal Voroshilof and the legend in large Russian characters:

"Voroshilof, the Victorious Proletarian Army greets you Here," followed by an exclamation mark.

A Russian soldier was standing in front of one staring at the picture of his commander-in-chief. I asked him whom the photograph represented.

"This is our Voroshilof," he informed me.

"And what is written underneath?"

"Underneath?"

"Yes, can you read it for me?"

The soldier obviously could not. He seemed embarrassed, but he told us to wait, and came back a second later with a companion who read it out with evident pride at his achievement.

Having left our luggage in the cloakroom we called a droshky, one of those old-fashioned horse cabs which are so typical of Vilna, and told him to drive to the department of railways, where Marjan had a friend whom he expected would be able to tell us what was going on in the town and nearer the frontiers. We wanted up-to-date information and this the railway people were most likely to have. Neither I nor Marjan paid any attention to the beauties of this Polish town, with Lithuanian traditions and its Renaissance and Baroque architecture, as in normal circumstances we should certainly have done. Sightseeing was not for us that day. We were both busy with our Ruthenian paper. While I read the tragic news of how the Russians and Germans had finally carved up my country, Marjan followed the other news on the back page. Suddenly he caught my sleeve and whispered nervously:

"Read this."

I took the sheet and read: "It has been noticed by the Soviet authorities that anti-revolutionary Poles belonging to the bourgeois cliques have been recently attempting to cross the frontier into Lithuania and Latvia. All such attempts have been thwarted.

In order to make further attempts impossible the frontier guards all along the frontiers have been considerably strengthened and orders issued to fire without warning on anyone attempting to escape."

"Blast! We have got so far all right, but it looks as if we're going to be stuck in Vilna."

Our first reaction to this news, which we read and reread, was a feeling of complete apathy and impotence. Our arms fell down, it seemed as if a huge gate had just been shut in front of us, barring our way. The swaying of the old cab bumping over the cobbles, the cracking of the whip, the bearded face of the driver and his worn old coat accompanied in our consciousness this sense of the hopelessness of our position. To be stuck in Vilna. Under the Bolsheviks! And then? What then?

But I was not made to despair. After the first shock, more encouraging ideas began to bubble about in my head and my hopes soon began to rise again.

"Listen, Marjan, if the Bolsheviks are so anxious to emphasize the fact that the frontiers are so closely guarded, it is probably just to put people off. Obviously people must have escaped, otherwise they would not make so much fuss about it."

Marjan also had his doubts.

"Yes. We must only ask your friend why the Soviet army is being moved north and what it all means. We want to be clear about that."

"Ssh! Ssh! Be careful. Think of the driver."

"That old thing? No, he can't hear; his horse makes too much of a clatter for that. But all right, we'll talk it over later."

"Look! Look! There's the Holy Shrine."

We took off our hats, as did the driver, to the Holy Shrine of the Virgin of Ostra Brama. The shrine, which is worshipped by all Catholics of Poland and Lithuania is treasured in an arch which spans the end of a narrow street. On the one side of the arch is the chapel of Pocię, rather reminiscent of a Chinese pagoda and its three curved roofs tapering into a crown-shaped louvre. At the foot of the shrine there are always a number of pilgrims and beggars playing on people's feelings, and to-day there

were more people than normally kneeling at their prayers. It was easy to guess what they were praying for. The passing Russian soldiers looked on smiling with interest at this devout crowd, but did not interfere in any way. They did not even pass under the arch of the shrine.

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At the Department of Railways we learned that Marjan's friend was no longer working there. A new Chief Director had just been appointed by the Bolsheviks and no one felt certain of his own job and they were all anxiously speculating as to the extent to which the Russians would supplant the Polish officials by their own. All we were able to find out was that the trains to the frontier towns were still running, though many of them were only used for moving troops. But this we could have learned just as well at the station.

Scarcely had we left the building when Marjan began searching frantically in his pockets and announced that he had lost his purse with all our Polish money. Well, that was adding trouble to misery. The few pounds which we had with us were not to be used here. We had to do something. I had noticed on several occasions that the Russian soldiers and even the officers were eager to buy watches, and this gave me an idea. We went to a narrow street in the Jewish quarter where there were several jewellers' shops. When we arrived there we saw a number of soldiers and even officers gaping at those poor shops which were already half-denuded of their wares. Nearly all the jeweller's shops had notices in the windows "All Watches Sold Out." Undeterred, the soldiers were stopping people in the streets, inundating them with generous offers for their watches, but they had by now developed a genius for selling and would not trouble about soldiers or platoon commanders whom they knew had not much money. Only in the presence of officers of the rank of commander and upwards would some draw out their watches, and invariably even those high officers were induced to offer a big price. Marjan learned the trick in a jiffy. He saw a high officer passing and rather ostentatiously pulled out his old watch, which, as he told me before, was not worth more than five shillings. The officer took



the bait and for his dilapidated watch Marjan secured 250 roubles which, however you may reckon the exchange, was a sum exceeding three pounds. Well done, Marjan! We were in funds again.

We felt so rich that we bought ourselves two pounds of apples. I should like to write an ode to the Vilna apples, which, of all the apples I ever ate, are by far the best. These particular ones had in addition the fine flavour such an excellent transaction imparts. The fruiterers' and the barbers' shops were the only ones where it was not necessary to wait in a queue. Everywhere else supplies were short and far too many wanting to buy. The private shopkeepers, unable to replenish their stocks, did not think it worth while to keep open, but dared not close as the Russian authorities would accuse them of not fulfilling their social function, with consequences which no one would risk. We were told that the Russian soldiers were not allowed in food shops. These were reserved for the civilian population, who otherwise would have got no food whatever. This regulation was similar to that in force during the siege of Warsaw, when our soldiers were not supposed to take places in civilian bread queues.

The few articles which the Russians did supply, chiefly matches, were sent only to Communist co-operatives, with the result that the shopkeepers found themselves with paper money but unable to make any use of it. We also had money, but, unlike the shopkeepers, did not think of replenishing our stock, but our stomachs. Marjan had already reminded me of that several times. With him it was impossible to forget about food.

On the way to a little restaurant which Marjan had been eyeing for some time, we passed a square where loud speakers were blaring out tunes and propaganda speeches all day long. You had to listen, whether you liked it or not. Five minutes of music and half-an-hour of most boring propaganda about the greatness and invincibility of the Soviet Union. How strange all this artificial Russification sounded within the walls of that peaceful, charming town whose architecture was western in style and owed much to the Italian architects whom the rich Polish families had summoned to Vilna. Cultural life had centred round the uni-

versity, while the artist found endless subjects in its picturesque old streets.

The superficial appearance of the town was now being changed. The cinemas only showed Communist films, all new posters and placards were in Russian and you could even see Soviet policemen regulating the traffic at some of the bigger crossings. Nevertheless the town did not look Russian. The Bolsheviks were only newcomers and they did not fit the place. Their soldiers did not harmonize with the patina of Vilna, nor did their clumsy and enormous tractors, which took up nearly the whole width of the street, their heavy lorries sometimes carrying smaller ones on the top, their numerous anti-tank guns, of which whole strings kept passing through the town. Those anti-tank guns, designed to follow the tanks, were mounted on broad tyres, but drawn by horses, if you could call those half-starved animals horses. How strange is the mentality of the Soviet army. It craves mechanization and is still half horse-drawn. You could count all the bones of their horses, in such poor condition were they, and they were covered with dreadful harness sores. What a contrast to the beautiful cathedral, with its clean classical lines and stout belfry, were those tanks and machine-guns posted at each corner of the Cathedral square, and manned by indolent and incompetent looking men.

It is strange that a nation, so unsuited to the mechanization of life as the Russian, should crave just that so strongly. You cannot mechanize the brains and hearts of men.

## CHAPTER XI

### RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

"Let's sit for a moment in the open and discuss our plans," said Marjan when we had finished lunch. "So far we have been very successful; don't let us mess things up now that we are on the last lap."

We were walking along the street looking towards Three Crosses' Hill in the distance beyond the Church of St. James, with its red-tiled roof descending in terraces and ending in the two baroque towers. Opposite a large public building in Pilsudski Square stood a number of Soviet passenger cars, each with its driver. Most of them looked very much like American Buicks and Fords; perhaps they were built under U.S.A. licence. They were painted black and seemed well-finished, but there was nothing special about them. The real entertainment began when one of the drivers tried to change a tyre. So grave an undertaking necessitated a general council and it took those men hours and hours to get that tyre changed. On many occasions I saw tiny adjustments take ages to perform and we were often told that if anything goes wrong with a Soviet mechanical vehicle it at once assumes the proportions of a major tragedy, because scarcely anyone knows how to repair it. They are like lady drivers, happy and pleased to go for a spin on a sunny afternoon, but the moment something goes wrong, then: "Where is the garage?" But in an army there is no garage and the men ought to be able to do running repairs themselves.

We sat down on a lonely bench. Marjan looked round to make sure that we could speak freely without being overheard, a useful habit, which he retained from the days when he lived in Russia.

"We shall most certainly be shot if they catch us trying to cross the frontier into Latvia."

"Yes. That is the risk we are taking, but can't you smell freedom; do you realize what it means to be able to continue the fight for liberty, for our ideals, for Poland?"

"Don't sentimentalize, let's be very practical. We cannot stay the night in Vilna, unless someone invites us to their house. Stopping in a hostel means reporting to the G.P.U. police, and that might wreck our whole plan."

"Certainly we should not do that."

"Are you prepared then to take the risk?"

"Don't be such an ass. Of course I am, nothing on earth will stop me."

"All right then. Judging from the paper, Latvia and Lithuania still exist as they were before the war; it seems therefore the wisest thing for us to try Latvia, as ultimately we shall want to get to Riga. Lithuania has no port from which we could sail west; moreover I do not yet fully understand the meaning of the big concentration of troops on the Lithuanian frontier."

"Perhaps they are going to invade Lithuania."

"Perhaps, but it is no good speculating about things. We will do that once we are able to read the free press again. Here we are still in the cage, a pretty dangerous cage."

Our plan was gradually acquiring more definite shape. We knew at least what we wanted to do and also realized the risk involved in trying it. I looked at Marjan. In his railwayman's cap he really looked like an official—no one could possibly discover in him a potential "frontier-crasher." But I still imagined myself as looking very suspect.

"We must both look as if we were locally employed," said Marjan.

"To do that I must get hold of a railwayman's cap too, and I think we ought to discard our bags, especially the rucksack, which attracts the attention of every one of these half-wits. I don't want to be stopped again as I was in Lida station."

Then a schoolboy came and sat on our bench, and we thought it safer to change the subject. We went to the railway station to scout round. By now we were getting quite expert at finding things out, and I felt sure that if we succeeded in overcoming the

final difficulty we could write a most useful textbook on "Unauthorized crossing of frontiers."

One of the streets near the station had been completely blocked by a column of huge military lorries. One had broken down and brought the whole line to a standstill. The soldiers keep on repeating that the trouble would be repaired very soon. The officer seemed terribly angry; his nose was red, he looked like a turkey, and he swore most magnificently. The poor men were doing their best, but they could not put things right. They didn't know how to handle their machines. Moreover they hadn't the right kind of tools, so some of them had had to be sent to fetch them from another unit. A driver told me that they had been there for the last six hours. The congestion gave us an opportunity to take a good look at some of the Soviet tanks, which had had to stop in the street behind the lorries. They seemed very thickly plated and very strongly armed. As well as machine-guns they had long thin guns in their streamlined turrets, probably armour-piercing guns. They looked like modern villas with their slit horizontal windows; their hatches were open and from each protruded two or three grinning faces spitting out husks of sunflower seeds and laughing at the annoyance of the officer and his complete impotence to cope with the congestion.

Near the station we passed some women coming back from the market with baskets which were not too full. Catering was not an easy business. Some of these baskets were very pretty and extremely handy, the work of the Vilna peasants. They were just the thing to give us the local colour we needed, so we stopped one of the women and offered to buy her basket. She accepted and Marjan paid for it out of the proceeds of his watch. The next step was to get a railwayman's cap for me. Here, too, we were lucky. Marjan, who now claimed to be a ticket collector from Radom (he could do so quite safely, as Radom was now in German hands and no one could check his statement) made a deal with a fellow railwayman—our warm blanket for his cap. So two railwaymen emerged from the shed. Our things were re-sorted, Marjan repacked his in the basket, while I removed all the buckles, pockets and straps from my rucksack, thus converting

it into a plain kit-bag like those used by the railwaymen here. My entry into the brotherhood of railwaymen was easy, but we had to be extremely careful because the first Russian officials had already made their appearance. As everywhere else they had to rely entirely on the advice of their Polish colleagues, and were eager to take it, because on the Vilna-Zawiasy sector, which the Russians had taken over entirely, there had been a serious smash the night before in which two troop trains were involved.

Our next step was to go to the buffet to see if we could find anyone working on the line towards the Latvian frontier who could tell us how the land lay and whether Polish railwaymen were allowed to go to the nearest frontier station. We were naturally very careful to disguise our plans. Collecting information is an art in itself. Marjan began by standing a few fellow-workers beer, the first I had tasted since the beginning of the war, and very soon we learned that there would be a train going to Turmonty, the frontier town; that no one was allowed to go there without a permit; that the Soviet troops had entrenched themselves all along the frontier, and that while Poles had succeeded in getting through until quite recently, such attempts were now entirely futile. One or two of the men seemed to know more about the route than the others and Marjan, by a brilliant manoeuvre, took one aside, leaving all the rest to talk generalities with me. He extracted most valuable information from the man who, as I learned later, was a member of a secret Polish organization and had been most helpful to various fugitives.

Having obtained all we wanted, the next point was to decide whether to take the risk with dice so very heavily loaded against us—a regular front line; the capital penalty for disobeying the perfectly clear order placarded and published everywhere; a curfew in full force in the frontier zone; a very small village where no one could arrive without being immediately noticed; and finally, Russian railway officials already established side by side with the Polish. Up to now we could always have pretended that we were "going home" if we had been caught, but on the very frontier of Latvia that excuse would not work. If we were stopped it would be only too obvious what we were there for; worse still,

there would be the suspicion that we were active officers in disguise. Against that was the chance of escape, of not having to wait under enemy domination for the long drawn-out issue of the war and, before everything else, the possibility of joining forces with those fighting for our cause.

The train to Turmonty left in the evening with us occupying a first-class compartment and claiming to be going "to the next station" to receive a goods train for which we had special instructions, allegedly issued by the new railway director. Our train was composed of the best Pullman carriages, and though now only running on a small local line, it was still made up as it had been when it was an international express; the inertia of the railway management had been too great to change it.

We had worked out alternative plans. Should we fall in with mere constables we would pretend to be important railway officials; should we meet some of the bigwigs, we were going to do some shopping in the nearest town. At first the train was full and we felt fairly comfortable. Our anxiety grew as it gradually emptied and we drew nearer and nearer the frontier. At any moment someone might come along; a gendarme, an officer, a G.P.U. policeman, or one of the dreaded frontier guards of the Red army.

From the window we could see the wooded country, the camp fires and the silhouettes of the soldiers huddled round them. It was clear that there was a large army encamped here all along the track.

*Thursday, 5th October*

We were now alone in the compartment, trembling all the time lest at the next station a search might be made and our papers demanded. We would have to rely on our wits. The sky sparkled with stars, which in the more northerly regions seem larger and brighter than in the south. Maybe that is nature's compensation for the loss of warmth in the sunrays. Though Marjan and I were fully preoccupied with our present situation, we could not for some time stop looking at these large twinkling stars; we simply could not. They were so beautiful.

"Assuming that we have arrived safely at Turmonty at four o'clock in the morning, what are we going to do?"

"What? We are going first to have a good sniff at the situation there. It will still be dark and we must under no circumstances leave the train. We do not know the station and might stumble into a trap. Then we should be done for and there would be no happy ending."

"You had a long talk with that railwayman in Vilna; did he give you any hints?"

"He told me to go to Mr. Rembel, the director of the co-operative, a real patriot and an ex-officer. If there is a way of crossing the frontier he would know it, he said, and if not, then we had better come back."

"That makes things clear. We must stay in the train as long as we can, and then hurry to Mr. Rembel."

Marjan had a short spasm of coughing which he did his best to stifle with his hand.

"Keep quiet, we must not attract anybody's attention. I will put the light out if you don't mind."

So we travelled on in the darkness, from which the occasional camp fires and the stars looked all the brighter.

The train slowed down and the sound of its wheels became rasping as it jerked over the points where the track branched into a shunting yard. The railway station! We knew that without seeing it. We were in Turmonty!

Turmonty, the frontier town, the last stop on the Polish side. This train, however, goes no farther, and to-morrow it will return to Vilna. For some people it was the end of a journey; for us it was the beginning of the great adventure. On one side was freedom, on the other the firing squad.

A few railwaymen and a number of Soviet officials got out, and the train was left alone. The engine was detached. After some twenty minutes of dead silence we heard someone coming along the corridor opening and shutting the door of each compartment. Who could that be? Who? Then we heard a voice saying to another in Polish: "The train is empty, no need to go



into the remaining compartments. You can take it from the station."

Polish conductors. Good. We can stay.

We kept as quiet as we could, waiting for the morning. Marjan had a slight cold and I was glad that the carriage was properly heated. It might get rid of his cough which came on at the most inopportune moments. We drew our blinds and in order to make it look more natural Marjan drew those in all the other compartments of our coach. Believe me, that was not because we feared the light of the stars or the gleam of the late moon. Oh, no! But a Russian sentry had walked past the train several times, his long rifle and bayonet clearly distinguishable. Fortunately for us after two or three hours of standing in the station the train was hauled into one of the sidings, and we knew that we could stay there fairly safely till six the next morning.

Day began to break well before six, the stars grew paler and from behind the drawn curtains Marjan and I kept watch. On the right was the town and the river, on the left the station and the fields. The camp fires seemed thicker on the right, and in the distance we could see some convoys and their sentries. We had been told that there were trenches all along the frontier and that these were manned. We looked and looked through a little peep-hole in the curtain, Marjan's head close to mine. Suddenly footsteps sounded in the corridor. The deuce! Who could that be? And we threw ourselves back in our seats and tried to look as though we belonged there. Then through the window in the door we saw something entirely unexpected; so unexpected that for a moment I thought I must be mistaken.

Along the corridor came a young girl, a very pretty girl, though her face was dirty and greasy and her fair hair ruffled. She was wearing riding kit, jodhpurs, shoes, and a soiled white silk blouse. Who on earth could she be, this pretty blonde sweep? Obviously she was not Russian, she did not look Polish, she could not be in disguise, as those riding breeches would attract everybody's attention. Her features were delicate and fine. Who was she? The mystery was quickly solved. She was a Miss Pritchard, an English girl of 19, who had been caught by the war in Poland, to which

she had gone from her home in the Lake District for a riding holiday. And she had had a holiday! She took it all very bravely and with a stoicism beyond her age. A young Pole had gone to great trouble to look after her, taking her from place to place as the German bombers grew too troublesome. They had known each other only since the war and, romantic as it sounds, she became engaged to her hero, though they could scarcely understand each other's language. Now she wanted to go to Latvia, where the British Consul in Riga, Mr. Hobson, would take care of her. All her papers were in perfect order, she had a Latvian visa, but the Russian authorities would not delegate anyone to bring her across the frontier. She had now managed to get to Turmonty and expected to be allowed to pass the few hundred yards dividing the Russian outposts from Latvia.

We liked the simple way in which she told us her story. But it was quite clear that she was very tired and hungry, so we gave her a tin of milk, a piece of soap and some lavender water, which we were sure would be more useful to her than to us, as well as a towel and a few other things we had acquired from the dead colonel's suit case in the convent. When she had washed her face with the lavender, she looked most lovely and attractive. We talked to her for a few minutes, asking her jokingly to put in a word for us with the Consul in Riga, to let Marjan have a visa if we succeeded in crossing the "green frontier." She also promised to drop a line to a friend of mine in Edinburgh to tell him that I had got as far as Turmonty.

Now came the difficult part. With very little luggage, only our basket and a small bag, we left the train with the air of men going to their work. In front of Marjan was a large mallet such as is sometimes used for testing the wheels of the carriages. He picked it up as if it belonged to him in the presence of dozens of Russian policemen and frontier guards. That was a little echo of the Captain of Koeppenick. Like two railway workers going to their jobs we strolled along till we finally found ourselves behind the station. There were fewer frontier guards there and we felt

more at ease. The next thing was to go to Mr. Rembel, the director of the little co-operative, our cicerone and only hope.

When we arrived at his cottage he was still in bed, but he received us at once and we talked while he pulled his trousers on. We were quite frank, as we had been told he would know anyhow what we were after, and it was better to be honest. He was a man of will and character; you could read that in his face, and it was emphasized by the set of his moustache and his quick glance.

"I am sorry to disappoint you, gentlemen. There is no point in mincing matters. Listen to me. There is not the slightest chance of your slipping away. Do you understand? Don't even dream of trying. If you had come some time ago, even five days ago, it could have been done. Now it is impossible. Impossible!"

That last "impossible" rang through the room. The tone was as firm and hard as steel. He continued, "If I could, I would help you, even at the cost of risking my own position. But now the frontier guards are everywhere. Two postmen tried to cross yesterday, and I saw them brought back under escort; they were executed a few hours later. Some people attempted to cross two days ago. Half of them gave up and the other half have never been heard of since."

"You are probably officers. Yes, I know. So am I, and would do anything for you. But it can't be done. Besides there is not much point in your standing here; you expose me to danger. Better be going; the frontier guards come here at any time of the day and night. I don't want you to be arrested at my place."

That was suspiciously like an invitation to go and at once. No! We will not allow our plans to go awry at this stage. We knew he was straight and meant what he advised, but we must extract more from him. I was the first to speak.

"If we risk our lives it is our business and not yours. We have decided to risk them. Tell us only where we shall risk them least."

"You risk them everywhere. It is all dangerous and impossible."

"Tell us then where it is the least dangerous and the least impossible," we insisted.

He saw that we would not go, and in fact wanted to help; but did not think he had the right to expose us to what he regarded as certain death. We persisted.

"You won't get through, but if I had to try I should take an empty basket with only what was essential, pretending I was going to some of the cottages on the frontier to buy fruit or butter. They belong to smugglers, but I warn you that the frontier guards are everywhere there. Now go, don't stay in my house any longer, you will ruin any chances you have if they see you coming from my cottage."

We left our bag with him and walked leisurely away unostentatiously carrying the basket. We soon reached the outskirts of the small village, then the next. At one bend near the church we passed some frontier guards, but they paid no attention to us, as the railwaymen often went shopping in the villages where food was cheaper.

We could feel the presence of the mysterious frontier; it was there, it was near. It was desired, it was feared. And finally in the distance, across the swamps and the little fields, we saw a row of white-washed stones marking the Polish side of the frontier, and two hundred yards farther on another line of stones, the Latvian side. It cut artificially through fields, marshes and meadows; it had been made by the people, by history; it had been made by blood. Nature would have nothing to do with it; both sides looked exactly alike.

Now there was no cover except an occasional tree or the isolated huts of the peasant frontier-smugglers. But to hide in their cottages you needed their permission, and to obtain their permission you had to surmount their panic fear of the Soviet, and also had to evade the vigilant eyes of the guards and the local militiamen, whose duty it was to spy on their fellow peasants. After all, this was the frontier, and a frontier which everybody wanted to cross, to escape over, where fortunes could be made simply by giving assistance. Here it would be no use to say that you had just come for a walk, or to admire the scenery. That would not answer here.

Beyond the little group of six poor cottages were only open fields,

so one of them would have to hide us. To venture now into the open would mean that we should be seen and caught, and, if none would have us, we should have to go back, and going back meant taking the next train to Vilna, and what that implied we knew.

In the first cottage they would not even speak to us, pretending that they were too busy digging potatoes. They looked most suspicious, though their faces seemed naïve and wore that expression of assumed goodness wicked people have. In the next cottage they would at least speak to us.

"Good morning, father," said Marjan in a way that meant, as both men knew, that there was much more to come. Each distrusted the other. The old peasant had small screwy eyes, a rusty ginger beard divided at the end like a goat's, longish hair, and wore a simple cloth suit. He took us into his cottage, which again gave that dual impression of saintliness and lewdness with its pictures of orthodox saints in their big halos on the walls, everlasting flowers twined into little wreaths, and a large pyramid of pillows on each broad bed.

In came the women. Saints, perhaps, but looking infinitely wicked. Long false faces, white kerchiefs, bare feet, children round them and children in their arms. One of them was pregnant. She was big with a child; her white apron, begirting her wide skirt, rose forming a hill just underneath the cord of her tunic. Her eyelashes lowered over her eyes. Was it shyness or craftiness which gleamed out from under them? Had these people completely lost their personality? They lied all the time, and lied so perfectly that it had become part of themselves and by inheritance perhaps natural and normal. The children were repulsive, not ugly but of poor build, badly fed, with spots and carbuncles on their faces. They were rickety, and when their mothers showed them to us, forcing them to stand up, they crossed their legs and twisted their feet, balancing only on one side with their toes raised.

"Lovely children, father," said Marjan, not meaning a word of it. "It's a blessing of heaven to have such a family."

"So it is, sir. So it is."

The women gazed curiously at us as we sat on the wooden bench talking very slowly so as to waste more time and to appear

more friendly. Our scheme, in fact, was to delay long enough to be in one of these houses till evening and then to slip across the frontier in the darkness. We were afraid of getting to the point too fast, lest the man should give us away. Also we had to show him that we did not mean any harm. This shifty, cunning old bird was no beginner and we had to show him our cards one by one, as he was showing us his.

"We thought of buying some bread and milk. Could you sell us any?"

"Yes sir, we shall be pleased to oblige."

A woman brought a jug and a large brown loaf which she started cutting. We did not eat much in case we had to repeat the process at other cottages, and brown bread takes up a lot of space.

"The war is over now," began Marjan. "I wonder how they are going to arrange the frontiers."

"I don't know; we are too stupid to understand such things," said the peasant, and two little sparks appeared in his rusty eyes.

"And how far is the present frontier?" said I, trying to lead up to the subject.

"The frontier?" said the peasant, as if we were blasphemously taking the name of some occult god. "I do not know where the frontier is, I don't," and a bored, tired look descended on his face.

He knew just as well as we did that a white frontier stone was planted in the middle of his own field two hundred yards away from the cottage, as visible from the window as the guardsman standing by it. We felt that matters required warming up a little, perhaps a small present would help. I took a bag of coffee from the pocket of my overcoat.

"You may perhaps like a little coffee for your kiddies and the women."

We watched the effect. The coffee was accepted; the women's eyes glittered, but the smuggler remained unmoved. Marjan then took him out into the back garden where they could not be easily seen and there he tried to entice him with a packet of roubles, but it was no good. The peasant was torn between two consuming

desires, for riches and for safety. Obviously he must have been warned, or feared the Bolsheviks so much that he could not bring himself to yield. In the end we came to the conclusion that the best way of terminating our visit would be to pretend that we had bought what we wanted and to go. We had at least got through one hour out of sight of the frontier guards, which was already capital in itself. But as it was only ten, we still had many hours to spend before evening came. We left the cottage with our eyes stealthily fixed on the white stones, the back of which we so ardently wanted to see.

Some way farther on was a small, rather poor-looking farm. We turned quickly into the yard to get out of sight of the Bolsheviks and walked up to the door of the cottage rehearsing another purchasing scene. The farmer himself was away and there was only his brother there. Conversation started at once:

"It is difficult to buy things in town, so we came out here. Perhaps you may like to sell us some sausage?"

"I should do so with pleasure, but you had better wait till my brother comes back; this is his farm."

"And have you also got a farm?"

"Yes, but it is on the other side of the frontier; my wife is looking after it."

That sounded excellent. We could continue.

"Do you ever go to your own farm?"

"I should like to go to my wife, but now it is impossible, because you cannot get permits to cross the frontier. My brother is in the Red Peasants' Militia, and if I went he would be responsible for me."

This sounded like straight talk, but could we trust it? Perhaps there was a catch somewhere. Careful! Beware! We dared not trust him.

"Have a cigarette and we will come later when your brother gets back."

We walked away and when we were hidden behind the cowshed slipped into it and climbed up to the loft above the pigsty. That was a brilliant strategical move, but most dangerous, for we were now completely at the mercy of the peasant if he discovered us.

What explanation could two Polish railwaymen give for hiding in the straw in a loft above a pigsty right on the very frontier? We lay there propped on our elbows eyeing the whole frontier from our vantage point through a peep-hole we made in the thatch. Then suddenly we heard the voice of a little girl outside the cottage. We drew back, pressing our faces close to the clay floor of the loft, but on the garden side was an opening in the boards through which we might be seen. This we soon patched up with straw and faggots.

But children are too observant. Half-an-hour later the child came out again and in a little plaintive inquisitive voice began asking her father: "Who covered the window of the loft? Pa, who covered the window of the loft?"

The peasant at first did not pay any attention to her, but for us every question was agony. We should have liked to shoot that child with invisible bullets to make her shut up. But she persistently went on: "Papa, papa, who covered the window of the loft?"

Below us the pigs grunted, clamouring for their daily bran of potato swill, and we could hear the farmer opening the door below and filling their troughs. At this moment of utmost danger a fit of coughing overcame Marjan.

"Good gracious, Marjan, stop it."

"I am coughing as quietly as I can."

The pigs below were eating greedily, uttering occasional grunts of satisfaction.

"For God's sake, Marjan, if you must cough, at least cough like a hog. That noise will betray us."

He laughed and tried to tune his coughing to the snorting of the pigs below. Very soon you could not tell which was which.

Marjan now felt that the time had come to open our last tin of beef and on this occasion I agreed with him. We had just begun our lunch when, to our infinite horror, a head appeared over the edge of the loft. We were lost, discovered! In a moment the man would call the Soviet guard. He was wearing a red armband himself. It was the farmer, who, having finished with his pigs, had now come to see why the window in the roof was



covered. In desperation we winked at him and made signs that he should approach. At once I produced our hush-money, a packet of roubles, which he took, and Marjan pressed on the astonished man a large alarm-clock which he had treasured ever since we stayed at the convent. We also gave him a whole packet of cigarettes and hoped thus to have done enough to worm our way into his good graces. We had to risk the rest. His eyes gleamed at the sight of these presents and possibly he was ours.

"It will be all right; you can stay. I am going to dig potatoes and will come later on."

A long day was still before us. It was very cold and the loft very draughty. How useful our blanket would have been here. But, alas, we had bartered it against my cap, which from now onwards would have to be discarded. We did not waste our time, however, and from the loft carefully surveyed the entire neighbourhood. The Russian guards patrolled the frontier keeping close to the line. We could see some standing with their bayoneted rifles near the marsh, just by the willows. They talked, lit their cigarettes, and one started using his field glasses.

"Marjan, we had better remove our heads from the hole; he is looking in this direction and might see us."

They stood for a while and then disappeared in the thickets and the rushes by the brook. It is exceedingly easy to get confused between the frontiers here, and if you take the wrong turn you may find yourself in Lithuania instead of Latvia.

Marjan wanted to light a cigarette, an act of folly I would not allow; but I promised him that he could smoke as much as he liked once we were across the frontier. How could one risk everything for a cigarette? But he said that he would go mad without one.

There we sat perched above the pigs, not knowing at all what was going on in the world, just hoping for the best and waiting for the darkness, which, with the introduction of Moscow time, would not come till about half-past seven. We were half-frozen and it was raining. The rain would help us, because the frontier guards would probably go under cover. I had hardly said that when we heard the clatter of hoofs in the yard and the sound

of Russian voices. Were we betrayed? Every second was agony, every movement seemed a roaring noise. No! They had not come for us, but for shelter. Putting their horses in the barn they entered the cottage, where the farmer treated them to tea. We could hear every word they said. The farmer, however, was loyal, and only talked about the weather and the crops and his farm. The rain still fell, but less heavily and the soldiers, putting up their collars, mounted their horses and rode away.

Oh, how reassured we felt. How relieved. The farmer climbed up to our loft again and told us that as they had hot water he could bring us some tea. However, we did not want to take the risk of his being seen carrying cups and the women knowing about us, and told him that we did not want any (though we were dying for some): "But if you could find us two old caps we should be most grateful."

Marjan did not believe in deferred payments and immediately showed him what our "gratitude" would look like by producing a hair-clipper, an article highly valued in these parts. "It's yours," he said, "but bring us two old caps." I wanted to take my railwayman's badge with me as a souvenir, but in the excitement of preparing for the great final step, I completely forgot it.

Then at last came the darkness. Our peasant showed us the lights of houses in the distance. "That is Latvia." How beautiful that word sounded. Latvia! No music could have a more seductive charm. "Latvia, Latvia." The end of our journey, the beginning of civilization.

We went out into the yard and the darkness and drizzling rain. Near the wall, down the field, farther along. And then began that mad run, the race for freedom. We came nearer and nearer to the white-washed stone. Yes, we were past it: it was already behind us. Then came a jump over the ditch and we were in Latvia. We stopped and listened for a second. Not a soul. Not a sound. Only the faint whirr of some marsh birds. Across the muddy fields we went straight towards the lights of the cottages, aiming at the last one in the row. No black-out here! But we had still to beware of the Latvian guards. We were too near

I SAW THE SIEGE OF WARSAW

the frontier, and it was such a night as none but trespassers would stay out in.

On and on. It is Latvia, Latvia! Civilization again. Wild with joy, we stepped into the cottage. It was inhabited by Poles.

## CHAPTER XII

### FRIENDS IN NEED

HAPPY as children and as free as birds we plodded along the main road towards Dvinsk, the nearest large town. Oh no, we would not accept the invitation of the peasant to stop in his house. We would sleep to-night in Dvinsk itself! And to-morrow we would go by train to Riga. The drizzling October rain turned the road into a quagmire of sticky brown mud that clung to the soles and heels of our shoes, but we never noticed how we had to pull our feet up at each step. We did not even feel tired. On the contrary we thought that the world was most beautiful. The silver birches with their white speckled bark and the trunks of the hornbeams seemed to us pillars in the hall of an enchanted castle. We had escaped from both the enemies occupying our country. How enviable was our lot. How many millions would gladly exchange their lot for ours. It seemed that the air was different here, that the ground was different, everything was happier and free. Madly enough, we did not feel it necessary to take as many precautions as hitherto. We allowed ourselves for this night to be free.

After several hours' walking we saw in the distance the glow from the lights of a town beckoning to us through the mist and rain. Like moths we made straight towards the light. Careless and stupid! Like moths we burned our wings.

A police officer found us outside a public building at that late hour of the evening. He looked at our muddied shoes and asked if we could show our papers. We did not understand, as he spoke in Latvian, but he immediately repeated his request in Polish. I produced my passport, which naturally had no entrance visa for Latvia, while Marjan had not even that. The officer asked us to follow him to the local command where another

officer joined in. They were both perfect gentlemen and it was a real change, after the Russian army, to see officers who were cleanly dressed and efficient.

Technically we were refugees who had crossed the frontier without permits, but strangely enough the officers who cross-examined us were not very interested in our personal affairs, but asked question after question about what we had seen of the Russian army. They became intensely interested when we told them about the troop movements, and called one of their superior officers, who brought a large map and asked us to show him where we had seen the Russians and what their equipment was. We were able to give them much more detailed information than if we had been left to tell the story unassisted by their helpful questions. It was a real pleasure to undergo such a cross-examination.

It looked as though they thought that Russia was preparing some foul move against their small country, which once already in its history had had a very bitter fight with the Bolsheviks in 1920, at the time when Poland hurled them back from the gates of Warsaw, and when Marshal Pilsudski, assisted by General Weygand, drove them out of central Europe. But we could not obtain any answer to our questions.

We were very glad to be able to give them information about our common enemy in return for their courtesy to us. However, when the examination was finished, we were not released as we had thought we should be. One of the officers told us with regret that, according to their laws, we were wrongdoers and would have to be handed over to the office of the frontier guard, where our fate would be decided. He promised, however, to put in a word for us in return for all the information we had given them about the Bolsheviks. On the way to the guard station I mentioned to the officer that the only Latvian I knew was a young doctor from Riga whom I had once coached for his examination. What was my surprise to learn that the young man was a distant relation of this very officer. Fortune seemed to be on our side. The officer handed us over, with a kind word, to the commander of the guard station who rang up the sheriff's office at Dvinsk,

telling him that two Polish fugitives had been caught at the frontier. What was he to do with them?

During his rather lengthy conversation we waited in the company of the other officers who once more asked us all we knew about the Bolsheviks. They seemed to be the bugbear of the Latvians. From those officers we learned that Russia had been demanding very far-reaching concessions, wishing to maintain garrisons in the country, and that Latvia was not in a position to oppose them. Similar demands were apparently going to be presented to Lithuania. Russia was on the move. The chief bulwark in the east—Poland—having been destroyed, she could now, with Hitler's blessing, bully her small neighbours.

Then the commander came back from his telephoning. But I did not like the look on his face; it was grave and sullen. Something had gone wrong. He spoke for a long time to the other officers and all their faces assumed dismal expressions as if something had indeed gone wrong. They sat round the table looking like doctors conferring at a death-bed. We felt a bit nervous and I asked:

"What has happened? Are we going to be interned?"

"No, I am sorry to tell you, something much worse than that," began the senior officer.

"Are we going to be imprisoned?" asked Marjan, frightened.

"We have unfortunately been ordered to return you across the frontier to the Russians, where you came from. Sorry, but the order is clear. There's nothing to be done."

"To the Russians?" exclaimed Marjan, "but do you know that that means sending us to certain death?"

The position was frightful. We had only just escaped and thought ourselves free, and now we were to be escorted back to the Soviet outposts. This was the end of us. My mind was working quickly. I tried to remember all the people I knew in Riga, the capital, to whom we might turn for help. But it was now very late and the order said that we had to be handed over that night. The commander rang up again and remonstrated on our behalf, and again the order was confirmed: "Return the fugitives where they came from." Latvia was a small state and

under pressure of her dangerous Russian enemy could not afford to displease her by assisting refugees from Poland, however much individually they might have sympathized with them.

For a moment I thought my death warrant was as good as signed and against all hope started to argue, though I knew that with their high sense of dignity and honour these Latvian officers would be scrupulous in carrying out their orders.

"Orders are orders," said one of the officers.

"You are then willing to send two innocent people to certain death?"

"Do you know what an order means to an officer?" they retorted, but without the wish to hurt, only to excuse themselves.

"We cannot go into the matter. We must obey."

"Well then what will happen to us?"

"You will have to go back to where you came from."

"Where we came from?"

The officers looked at one another, and the one who had come with us rubbed his forehead:

"The frontiers of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland meet here: how do we know that they came from Poland?"

I jumped to it. "Of course we did not come from Poland, we came from Lithuania," I said, seizing the hand held out to us. Their order said they were to hand the fugitives back where they came from, and if they came from Lithuania then back to Lithuania they had to go. Everybody sighed with relief. That was a gallant piece of work. Gallant indeed, in these times when you have to do things in which you do not believe merely because there is a big bully to force you to act against your will.

It was very late before we left under the escort of an experienced old stager of a corporal armed with a rifle and a huge pistol stuck in his belt, and a private. Before our departure the officers gave us some apples and asked whether we wanted any bread. We shook hands with them and disappeared into the night with our escort, which had to make sure that we got clear of Latvian soil.

*Friday, 6th October*

What had happened was a great setback to our plans. Instead

of being on our way to Riga we were now marching under escort towards Lithuania, from where we should only have to return to Latvia if we were to reach Riga. Our further plans were now quite definite. We must get to Riga, whence we would sail via Stockholm and Norway to England to join the Polish Legion. But what would happen to us in Lithuania we did not know. At present reality for us was the old corporal marching ahead across the fields and the private keeping a watch on us from behind. In the corporal's walk was something of the springy alertness of the experienced poacher, but he was now a respectable soldier, supervising what (until a few days ago) was a quiet frontier on which nothing very much happened, separating two very friendly nations, Latvia and Poland; one of the few frontiers in eastern Europe where there were no claims to be settled on either side. At about two o'clock in the morning we arrived at an advance frontier post in which were a number of guards. The corporal enjoyed an enormous reputation among them. Our catch was, of course, the great sensation of the day, or rather night. On learning that we were Poles, the men showed us every sympathy, and gave us cigarettes and apples. We noticed with pleasure how widespread was the knowledge of the Polish language; every man could speak it fluently.

After a short rest the corporal started off again and we walked several miles until we reached a hay stack. We did not think there was anything special about it until we observed him stop and flash his torch. Much to our surprise we saw some Latvian soldiers crawl out half asleep, some of them still tidying their tunics and coats, others pulling the hay out of their hair. A lovely picture! The disciples in the olive grove could not have been more sound asleep or more astonished than they at our arrival. There was something bucolic, something charming about those men so happily drowsy on duty. The efficiency of the German and the danger of the Soviet were not yet fully realized here. The corporal detailed one of the soldiers to escort us to the frontier itself; the wise old bird, he did not want to show himself there in case he might be seen by the Lithuanians. Every profession has its dignity and respectability, which must be



preserved. After two more hours of walking along narrow lanes and bushy paths we stopped; the soldier pointed to a lake and told us to go, go across to Lithuania. He signed to us to keep quiet and not to return.

We went straight on towards the moon. Straight on. The Latvian soldier and Latvia were behind us; in front of us our adventures in Lithuania and our journey to England. We were tired, not having slept for several nights, and our feet began to drag. Unfortunately we very soon lost our way and began, the worst thing in the world, to quarrel.

"We must turn to the right."

"Idiot! Do what you like, I am going straight on, that is what the Latvian soldier told us."

"I will not go straight on under any circumstances; going straight on means going directly to the Bolsheviks."

The result was that the early morning found us, after a whole night's march, exhausted on the road, one mile from the frontier.

Half dead we trailed along the road in the midst of gorgeous lake scenery, Marjan insisting that we must stop at some cottage to rest and, of course, eat. It was five in the morning when we began looking for a farm, but imagine our bad luck! A Lithuanian policeman, passing on his bicycle and seeing two tramps, stopped us at the point of his revolver. And again our progress was held up. We, who thought ourselves masters in crossing frontiers, had succeeded in one night in being arrested in Latvia and were now plodding along a road among the forests and lakes of Lithuania beside a policeman and his bicycle.

The police station was near a large farm belonging to a Pole. The Lithuanian police were more than kind and, before taking our particulars and finger-prints, allowed us to have a wash, a shave, and gave us brushes to clean our shoes and clothes. Truly a Christian nation! We did not know how to thank them for their decency. Again we were among people who were human, who sympathized with others, whose hearts were not of stone, whose blood was not mercury. The only unpleasant thing was having our finger-prints taken: we had to stamp our papillary lines from the front and from the side, each finger separately and

all together. My finger-prints are so faithfully recorded in the Lithuanian police archives that I must be more than careful what I do and touch should I ever return to that country. Another unpleasant surprise was the arrest placed on our belongings. We had to empty our pockets of everything; penknife, fountain pen, lighter, notecase, razor, but saddest of all was saying farewell to my diary, which I thought I might never see again. All our things were made into a sealed parcel and retained by the police until further notice.

After this we were allowed to walk about the farm, whose hospitable owner gave us a delicious meal and later invited us into his orchard to gather as many apples as we could possibly take. Both he and his wife were really sweet to us, entertaining us royally and trying to make every moment we stayed in their house as pleasant as possible. Marjan naturally chose to have a little rest, and was offered a bed on which he stretched himself, but I preferred to talk with the farmer and his wife, being once more in a free country where people have wireless and can listen to news.

They told me that they had heard on the wireless that the Nazi authorities were now firmly established in Warsaw, and had set up their offices in the buildings which had survived the siege. How dreadful it all sounded. The Palace of Bruhl was now the military headquarters. From them I also heard how the Baltic States had had to give important territorial rights to the Soviet army. After a little while spent in the garden admiring the Lithuanian autumn with its mixture of red and brownish yellow, we came back and turned the wireless on, just in time to hear the end of Hitler's speech in which he warned the world that he was not prepared to concede anything from what he had acquired, and sneered at the folly of Poland in allowing herself to be instigated by Britain to oppose such infinite might as that of Germany. It was futile and silly. Now he proposed peace!

This interlude was interrupted by the appearance of the policeman with the order to escort us to Zarasoi, whither a small cart and strong horse were ready to take us. At least we should not have to walk any more, which in the circumstances was excellent.

Again we had proof of the great humanity of the Lithuanians when our guard, seeing that we felt very cold, gave us his own sheepskin. Under such a sheepskin one can appreciate the beauty of the Lithuanian wooded country and blue oblong lakes.

At the county town of Zarasai we were allowed to go to a shop belonging to a Polish merchant, Mr. Stankiewicz, where again we were given provisions and fruit. In the market square we passed an old gentleman walking with his dog.

"That is Professor Waldemaras," remarked the policeman.

"Waldemaras, your late prime minister?"

"Yes."

It was strange to see this historic figure, one of the chief propagandists against Poland and agitator for the return of Vilna, strange for us Poles to be in his country, entirely at its mercy and still to feel that its people would treat us decently.

The prison was in the market square, a gaily-coloured place surrounded by small daintily painted houses and stalls. The policeman rang the bell and a moment later a prison door closed behind me for the first time in my life. We were taken first into the office, where the policeman was given a receipt for us and our belongings. It was the first time that I had been sent anywhere against a receipt like a registered letter. From the office we went to the quartermistress, where we were given a porringer, mug, blanket, sheet (a special favour), a tiny pillow filled with straw, a pillow case, a spoon and a towel, all ticked off in her book as they were handed over. Thus equipped we were taken to Ward 10 and locked in with eight other men. Our appearance caused a stir, but when they learned that we were Poles their attitude became visibly hostile. They thought that we were officers and what one of the prisoners called "bloodsuckers," and exhibited every sign of contempt and derision. Not knowing how long it would be our good fortune to share our cell with these fellow-boarders, we attempted to pour oil on the waters.

It did not take us very long to discover how functions were divided among the prisoners. The leader of the whole cell was a certain Szymanskas, a Pole as his name indicated, but when we were there he naturally denied any connexion with that "lousy"

country. He was the most intelligent of the lot and an ardent Communist, a typical demagogue, one quarter intellectual, but obviously deficient in education and reasoning power. He was the real boss in every respect, and if we could win him over the rest would go with him. He had a sworn disciple in a young peasant boy, club-footed and degenerate, who accepted every word he said without comment. The others were ordinary criminals. Two were there for larceny, one for murdering his employer, one for theft, and the rest for minor offences. Really interesting was only the Communist who, though he always managed to avoid doing any work, enjoyed the respect both of the criminals and of the guard. The appearance of two Poles, it will now be understood, could not be popular.

But even in prison life there is a certain amount of etiquette and this required that the "fresher" be shown the ropes. It was like being shown round in a boarding-house. We were greatly surprised at the keen interest which Mr. Szymankas took in the working of our bowels; which, for my part, I have always regarded as my strictly private affair.

"If you do not go to the lavatory at six to-night, you will not be allowed to till seven to-morrow."

Of course everything was organized, even that, with the regularity of a clock. We understood and felt grateful. A woman prisoner brought dinner in a big pail, out of which the soup was poured into our porringers. I may add, perhaps, that ours was a women's prison, with one ward only for men. After dinner the prisoners were taken in pairs to the lavatory, where they were allowed to stay five minutes each at the utmost. After that the cell was locked. At eight o'clock came the inspection by the prison commander. We all stood at attention and at his appearance everybody shouted the word "Ramie," of which I did not rightly know the meaning.

There was still one hour before bed time, and that was entirely devoted to an exposition of Szymankas' views which were demagogic and lifted straight from communist elementary text-books. He was a disciple of the Comintern and repeated the hackneyed arguments, very often without mutual coherence. Nobody under-

stood him, but as he spoke with great conviction they all thought he was right. His degenerate disciple could keep on asking the same question an infinite number of times and enjoying the same answer. Most of his questions referred to the benevolent father Stalin, the high quality of Russian boots and the marvels of Russian progress, and to the excellence of Russian education. Mr. Szymanskas asked to see our shoes and on them he demonstrated the infinite superiority of Russian boots. He kept on repeating that all Poles believe in miracles, ghosts, and priests, and that it was the leadership of the clergy and landlords which had wrecked Poland, whose independence was in fact only now beginning under the Soviets. He could not, of course, explain how it was that Stalin and Hitler had joined hands and dismissed embarrassing questions by saying: "You have a bourgeois mind." He continually gabbled "Polish officers have danced Poland over to the Germans dancing the mazurka," whatever that may have meant. He was full of stories about Polish generals accepting bribes from the Germans and leading their men astray; spoke of the numerous paramours of all the Polish ministers and their fortunes accumulated abroad; all the trash dished up by the Soviet and German propaganda for the consumption of the illiterate.

He had, however, a very subtle way of making himself leader. He was the only man who had flints. What is the good of a lighter without flints? He had the monopoly. He could cure the prisoners by placing his caps on their shoulders and back when they had a cough; he was the only person in the whole prison who could repair the cabbage-slicing machine, without which the whole prison, including the guards, would be without cabbage soup. He had such things as a pencil, paper, and a tiny clasp razor; he was the one man who would comment on the news, and even the guardsmen outside the prison came to him with newspapers and to ask his authoritative views. Thus, by monopolizing all the vital things which made prison life more tolerable and by rewarding the prisoners and the guards according to services rendered, he could rule and be obeyed. I too had to have recourse to his favour, asking for a sheet of paper on which to write my notes, as my diary had been taken away with my other things.

The rest of the evening was spent by Szymanskas talking endlessly. At nine the light was put out and then the real show began, our "christening." The prison bunks were on two levels; we slept on the upper deck, while the rest occupied the more convenient bottom benches. Suddenly under the leadership of Szymanskas' disciple began first a concert of most indecent songs and bawdy expressions which provoked general mirth, followed immediately afterwards by a cannonade which released such an amount of gases that the atmosphere became completely foul. Such explosions were greeted by a burst of giggling, while we were almost suffocated with the stench. We did not show our annoyance, in order to avoid further salvos, and when all the riot had subsided I dashed to the bars to open the window slits.

*Saturday, 7th October*

The prison rule was not very strict. The morning was spent in tidying the cell for Sunday and washing the floors. The only man who did not do any work was Szymanskas. He was a born orator and not made to labour. He talked instead. A very important function in prison is the killing of insects, especially fleas, a process requiring a certain amount of skill, which only comes with practice. On the whole, however, the municipal prison of Zarasoi was fairly clean and the food did not leave much room for complaint. The portions were so large that our stomachs, which were not accustomed to much food, could not absorb them all and we had to leave some. The criminals, seeing that, began to doubt whether we Poles were as greedy as Szymanskas had made out. We offered half our portions to them, a piece of strategy which contradicted much of the communist's eloquence, who represented every Pole as an exploiter, taking food from other people's mouths.

At twelve o'clock we were allowed to see the prison chaplain, whom we asked to make representations to the authorities for our release. We also saw the governor of the prison in his private room, where he had a large board on which each prisoner's name was written on a slip of different coloured paper, according to

what crime he had committed. The communists were on red, illegal midwives on blue, our names were on green.

On our return to the cell we were met by snicers:

"They were confessing their sins to the priest," mocked Szymanskas and said something nasty about us in Lithuanian (otherwise our conversations were in Polish and Ruthenian, which everybody understood).

"Did the bastard give you absolution for your lousy sins?"

"We did not go to confess but to have a talk with him about the situation," answered Marjan with emphasis on the word "situation." This upset the effect so carefully staged by Szymanskas, who represented every Polish officer and in fact every Pole, as a religious bigot.

"About the situation, did you say? And what did the bastard say?"

Through the windows we could see the courtyard, where the first batch of women prisoners were just being taken out for their one hour's walk. The inhabitants of our cell were glued to the bars and watched the women with eyes avid with sexual passion unsatisfied for such a long time. A subnormal, over-sensual youth smacked his lips, tossed back his silky dark hair and commented on the women's figures and potentiality. With burning eyes they were piercing the women right through. I have never seen such an exhibition of collective desire.

Our hour was taken up in chopping wood and sawing logs. Both Marjan and I worked hard, not wishing to shirk our duties in any way. During the chopping I was asked by the guard who watched our progress sympathetically, what we thought of Vilna. I was frank and told him that, though no doubt a town with Lithuanian traditions, it was actually inhabited by Poles. This answer did not go down very well and I realized that it might have had consequences for us. I regretted my imprudence, but it had slipped from my tongue like *pursi muove*.

While we were working in the yard three other prisoners, among them an old man sentenced for theft, went to fetch potatoes for the prison kitchen. When we got back to the cell I was much amused to see the old man empty his pockets, which were full

of potatoes he had stolen from the kitchen. These were put in the stove and there roasted for the whole cell.

Dinner, composed of really good noodles in hot milk, was brought to us earlier than to the others, and we were told to get ready to go. Our belongings were returned to us and we were taken under escort to the police cells, a more honourable place of confinement, but one where the accommodation was much inferior and where you were not given any food until after you had been there 24 hours. Anyhow it was a change for us. Having served a reduced term for crossing the frontier, we were now taken into custody until the authorities should decide what to do with us. From our point of view it was time to act, for it might be too late to-morrow.

The policeman who escorted us was the first Lithuanian to treat us roughly; apparently he had heard about the two "bloody" Poles who said that Vilna was not Lithuanian.

*Sunday, 8th October*

The arrival of two Poles was immediately followed by a stiffening of regulations in the arrest, where normally the door was kept open and the prisoners walked about freely in the garden. No one dreamed of escaping. But when ferocious and dangerous Poles like ourselves were there all the doors were kept shut, to the considerable annoyance of the other prisoners. No wonder, therefore, that they wanted to get rid of us as quickly as possible. That, from our point of view, was something we could exploit to our advantage. Make them work for our liberation. We were only afraid of one thing, of being sent back to the Bolsheviks, a possibility which could not be overlooked.

One of the prisoners was very helpful and proved a real friend in need. He was an enterprising Jewish business man, the owner of a bus. He told us his story.

"I was arrested for being charitable."

"For being charitable?" repeated Marjan.

"Yes. I shall have to stay two weeks under arrest."

"Come on, nobody is arrested for being charitable. You must have done something else."



But he insisted that it was for his good heart that he was now in custody.

"It was like this. My bus is licensed to carry 24 people. As we were going to Kovno I saw three old ladies standing in the road. The bus was full. They wanted to go, so I stopped and took them. That made more than the regulation allows."

And so he was condemned for charity. Naturally he charged the three women the full price for their tickets, and as this was not the first "charitable" act he had done the judge fined him 200 litas or two weeks for exceeding the licensed number. The merchant assured us that he could easily have paid the fine, but business being as it was and petrol so expensive, he preferred to do his two weeks.

"And so you see I am here for being charitable."

We thought that this cunning, friendly man might wish to be charitable to us also and I promised him my table lighter which I still had in my pocket, if he would help us to get out.

The plan was worked out in a minute. The business man had a little boy who brought him food from home twice a day. The authorities were quite liberal in this respect, and allowed him to have his Yiddish newspaper and to talk to his son. When the little boy brought him his food that evening he whispered a few words to him and the boy disappeared like lightning. The obliging man asked us to have some food with him and to appreciate the way his wife prepared beef "clops." A similar offer came from the other prisoner who wanted us to try the way his Ruthenian wife did carp, so that instead of the regulation fast we enjoyed something of an international cooking competition, at which we occupied the pleasant position of judges. There is still a tremendous amount of human kindness among simple people, I thought, and stopped despairing about the future of the world. If only common sense could come into its own again. If only all the doctrinaires could all be deported to some inaccessible island the liberal, tolerant and pleasant world could be built again. To make a complete success of the job, I would also deport to these islands all the well-meaners and wishful-thinkers.

The Jew was poring over his newspaper, and from time to time turned to us saying:

"Such a power, such a country, such a large army, 35 million people, and all this has disappeared in four weeks. It is terrible even to think of it."

The Ruthenian passed his time killing flies with a fly-flap.

When it grew dark we heard somebody knocking gently at the window of our cell. We opened quickly and a voice whispered in Polish:

"Have you been arrested for crossing the frontier?"

"Yes."

"I have been told about you and my brother has already been to see the sheriff, although it is Sunday. To-morrow we will telephone to Kovno to have you released."

"How can we thank you for what you have done for us?"

"Don't be silly, aren't we all Poles? Isn't it our duty to help you in need? Better tell me whether you require any food."

And before we had time to answer he dumped a heap of apples on the window sill and disappeared.

They are wonderful these Poles living abroad. They probably feel what has happened to us more than we ourselves. And Hitler deludes himself that he can kill such a nation!

*Monday, 9th October*

The hardness of wooden boards is a very relative term. After the hopeful promise of our new friend sleeping was easy and blissful even on the prison boards. Even the bare dirty walls and the filthy water in the wash basin were coloured with the joy of our probable release. Everybody was jubilant. The Jewish merchant who had sent the ball rolling by sending his son to the local Poles, kept on repeating with satisfaction:

"You see, a Jew can be a decent man like everybody else. One should not persecute the Jews: let them live in peace and they will mean well to everybody."

It was a general cup of kindness which everybody enjoyed, we to such a pitch that they asked us to sing Polish songs and joined in with us. Marjan went even further and conducted our choir

of four in *Frère Jacques*, *dormez vous*. I never heard such cacophony in my life, interrupted from time to time by the taps of the Ruthenian killing a gnat with his fly-flap.

The Jew spent the morning reading a new batch of papers and threw the more interesting morsels to us:

"Chamberlain has rejected the peace offers of Hitler. So it says in my paper. Oh, wait, wait! This is even more interesting. Hitler has offered his guardianship to the Jews and will set up a new Jewish kingdom in Lublin."

"Where?" said Marjan. "Lublin is in Poland."

"It says in my paper that the arch-enemy of the Jew wants to become now the Jews' protector. The same arch-enemy of the communists made a pact of friendship with them."

"And what does your paper say about it?"

"Naturally it does not trust Hitler."

At four o'clock came the policeman with an order for our release, and we were taken to see the magistrate. Influential friends had intervened in the capital on our behalf, but we should never have been able to reach them had it not been for the little son of our friend, who handsomely deserved the lighter.

We shook hands warmly with everybody, including the guard, and took possession of our meagre belongings. We were given a permit to go to Kovno, valid for seven days, in which time we had to complete the formalities necessary for our departure. So the trespassers once again became law-abiding citizens.

And again we were free. The rest of the evening we spent with the local Polish colony which had so actively contributed to our liberation and which now entertained us with supper. As a humble sign of our gratitude Marjan and I gave them an eyewitness story of the siege of Warsaw. They were greedy for details so that only about 10 o'clock were we able to say goodbye and go to the house of two brothers, where we arrived just before the lights were extinguished. In Zarasoi the electric current was cut off at half-past ten to save fuel, the supply of which was extremely short. That was the first sign of shortage we had noticed in this charming country so rich in foodstuffs and so hospitable, the first pinch of war. I experienced a double feeling

of regret and satisfaction: regret because the Lithuanians were short of electricity, satisfaction because I imagined how short the German supplies must be, if even the neutral countries were feeling the war like that. But otherwise how queer it is to be in a country which is at peace, where things are not smashed to bits, where everything functions more or less normally; where after being wreckers and outlaws, we have again become human beings.

*Tuesday, 10th October*

The only bus to Kovno left in the morning. Lithuania is a beautiful country of forests and lakes and charming cottages with rounded windows and red roofs of wooden tiles. The silver birches gave a touch of white to the red and yellow landscape speckled with occasional green. In the roadside shrines were wooden figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary carved by peasant hands with the delicacy of lace.

By the time we arrived at Kovno all our co-passengers knew that we came from Poland, and with the real Lithuanian hospitality offered us baked apples, local cheese cakes and other choice dishes, which we had to try. Our little basket bulged with the provisions their kindness prompted them to give us. One old lady presented us with a warm scarf which she said we should need. These were gifts straight from the heart.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ANCHORS AWAY

LOOKING, in our old caps the smuggler had given us, like a couple of tramps, we presented ourselves, with the little basket as our only luggage, at Thos. Cook's in Laisves Aleja, the chief street in the town. The office was filled to overflowing with Polish refugees, most of whom had been in Lithuania since the second week of September. From the large crowd and the harassed look of the staff we could see that the question of tickets and visas would not be very easy. Some had already been waiting weeks for their papers. Marjan had first to obtain a passport and a British visa and we both required transit visas for Norway and Sweden and Latvia, if we wanted to travel via Riga. We had also to book a passage on the boat from Riga to Stockholm for which we had to pay in foreign exchange. All this sounds extremely simple, but it meant staying several days in Kovno and, moreover, the first boat which could take us would not leave Riga until Wednesday week. That left us with a full seven days, which we thought would be enough to complete all the formalities and to obtain money from London.

Our next visit was to the Polish Legation which was issuing passports to those who had been unable to take their papers with them when they fled from Poland. Marjan had to obtain one from the Legation. Here we met a large number of old friends and I got news of my uncle who had left Warsaw in the first week of September. He had been seen safe after the bombardment of Brest Litovsk. While Marjan was struggling with his passport, I had a short talk with the Polish Minister, Mr. Charwat, who, hearing that we had seen the whole siege of Warsaw, had asked to speak to me. He told me how apprehensive he was of the Soviets offer to hand over Vilna to the Lithuanians in return for far-

reaching concessions. Naturally his position as representative of Poland would become impossible and, as a sign of protest, he would have to leave Kovno, full though it was of Poles, who would then have no one to represent their interests. There were so many people waiting to see him that he invited me to dinner, when I should be able to give him a fuller account of what I had seen.

While Marjan called on the Polish Society in Kovno which was responsible for finding quarters for Polish refugees, I went to the British Consul, Mr. Gent, with whom I had tea.

Through the Polish Society in Kovno Marjan found us a very hospitable refuge with Captain and Mrs. Tybert, who invited us to stay with them as long as we were in Kovno. After I came back from dining with Mr. Charwat, where I heard the Polish broadcast from London, we stayed talking late into the night.

*Wednesday, 11th October*

Before obtaining my visas I had to get photographs of myself. I would not mention the photographer were it not for the following little incident. Photographers are naturally versatile men and by profession talkative and pleasant. In this respect our man did not differ from the others and in the course of the conversation he first tentatively and later more openly offered to buy any pounds sterling we should be prepared to sell, and was ready to give us a higher rate than the nominal one paid by the Bank of Lithuania.

"I should like a few pounds for my wife. She likes the look of them. She's always been such a companion to me," said the photographer. "But do not give me away, because there is a heavy penalty for buying sterling."

Thus, entirely accidentally, we came across the black bourse of Kovno. As his price was really very tempting we told him that we would sell him two pounds, which was all we had. This was a windfall, which Marjan thought we ought to spend on a good meal and a drink, and I gladly agreed. Food in Kovno was excellent and very abundant, but the shops had very little else to tempt one. We allowed ourselves, however, the luxury of new caps, because in ours we looked like two petty thieves (not of

the Dillinger class). As we were leaving the latter, a policeman came in with the order for all shops to close, as a national holiday had been proclaimed to celebrate the restoration of Vilna to Lithuania. The town was quickly decked with Lithuanian flags and the streets filled with batches of students and school children marching up and down singing. For us Poles this rejoicing was like that of cannibals who had just had a good bite out of their neighbour. Loudspeakers filled the streets with the music of Chopin's A major Polonaise. It shows how deeply Polish culture had penetrated under the skin of these people, that on their day of celebration they naturally turned to the Polish music of Chopin. It was a posthumous victory for Poland and her culture. In a way I was glad that Vilna, that beautiful town so dear to every Pole, should be in the care of the Lithuanians. That was ever so much better than for it to remain under the Bolsheviks.

While the celebrations were going on in the main streets the Kovno communists stormed the prison, which was next door to the British Legation, insisting that the political prisoners should be released. They thought that now that Lithuania had received such a present from Russia all the communists should be released. It was an interesting coincidence. I was just at that moment in the British Legation seeing the minister, Mr. Preston, who on this occasion did not look at all like the representative of a great power. Toothache pesters ministers as well as common folk and Mr. Preston was suffering from that most democratic of troubles. He sat in an armchair in his room with his badly swollen face wrapped in an old school scarf. But not even toothache could cloud his clear judgment or destroy his charm. He insisted that the conversation should go on, and I was impressed by the shrewdness of his comments. His knowledge of Russia was unrivalled.

"You know," he said, "in Russia the revolution also started with festivities and music. Most revolutions start that way."

*Thursday, 12th October*

I had to make an early start this morning, because the Norwegian consul only received visitors between seven and eight, which, even

in Kovno, is rather an early hour for business. He was an elderly, learned gentleman, combining his function of consul with that of university professor. In normal times this was quite easy, but with the war the stream of passengers through Norway had grown unusually large and he had to start work at dawn. He told us that he was born a Russian and had lectured in Moscow University before the Bolshevik revolution: now he preferred to be in Kovno, where a large number of his colleagues were former Russian professors. Some of the lectures were even now given in Russian. It was good in these days to hear of such an example of the brotherhood of learning, in which differences of language did not constitute any bar to the chair. I told him about my university friends in England, many of whom had come from various parts of the world to contribute to British science.

I also had time to obtain my Swedish visa at a legation, which was housed in a very shapely villa on a hill overlooking the river and the town. But the greatest pleasure of the day was a long overdue visit to the Turkish bath. Immaculately clean, I sat down in the evening to listen with our hosts to the Polish broadcast from London. It was becoming a kind of general habit among the Poles of Kovno to listen to this bulletin. The most recent obtainable *Times* which I bought to-day was of 4th October, the news a little stale.

*Friday, 13th October*

Parting is a sweet sorrow indeed. Marjan is going to-day to the country for two or three weeks, while he waits for his papers. He has been advised to do so by people who know and who will take good care of him. He will stay on a rich estate where he will coach the owner's two young sons. From his point of view the arrangement is ideal, but I am losing a friend and companion and shall have to finish my journey alone. Of course the difficult part is over. The rest is just a pleasure trip. But it is not such a pleasure to try to obtain the Lithuanian visa, without which I shall be unable to leave. Hundreds of Poles are lined up all day long in the ministry, which is not at all suited for dealing with such an influx of uninvited foreigners. In the circumstances I



greatly admired the small but extremely efficient organization of Lithuania. In all frankness it would have taken five times as long to have the same formalities done in our own country. All credit to the Lithuanians.

I also applied for a Latvian visa, which is very hard to get since they will not stamp your passport until you show that you have already booked a passage from Riga to Stockholm. The way they deal with British passport holders is not particularly courteous.

I went to-day to the smart Café Conrad feeling rather embarrassed in my shabby clothes. I was meeting a business man and he told me that from the economic point of view the annexation of Vilna would have unwelcome consequences for Lithuania. The price of sites in Kovno had already fallen at the news that the capital might be moved to Vilna. The stores of Vilna would have to be entirely replenished, and the town, which is unproductive and lacking in industries, fed; prices had already gone up. Moreover, in Vilna, Lithuania, which was already so much influenced by Polish culture and possessed a large Polish population, would acquire an almost purely Polish town. He was a Liberal and did not believe in persecution or forcible denationalization, but he frankly told me that he did not see how otherwise the Lithuanians would be able to stomach this comparatively enormous increase of their minority population. There was certainly something in that. He even went as far as to say that he feared that Russia, not being able or not wanting to feed Vilna during the winter when her own supplies were short, had given the baby to the Lithuanians to hold and would claim it back immediately after the next harvest.

*Saturday, 14th October*

To-day a money order arrived from London, where a friend had arranged to have it sent to me through the Foreign Office. But having money in Lithuania does not end the story. One must have the right to cash it and take it out of the country. In order to do that I had to fill up application forms at the Bank of Lithuania, a process which took up another whole morning. It

was pouring with rain and the buses are very few and far between, the municipality having to economize on petrol, and going from one office to another takes much time.

In the Polish Club I met a number of old friends and went with them to see a Polish film *The Rose* at one of the leading cinemas. This was one of our best films and on a high artistic level. The story revolved round Poland's fight for her independence, the rose representing the idea of freedom. It was produced months ago as a documentary film and nobody ever dreamed that its subject would so soon become reality for the Poles; a very bitter reality.

I noticed that the majority of the films showing in the town were Polish and that the public (the older generation at least) understood the language. The younger people do not learn it now at school.

After supper the whole Tybert household listened to the Polish broadcast from London. Apparently Hitler had made another speech yesterday in which he said that as his offer of peace had been rejected, he was going to "show" France and Britain what he could do. Now he was going to start. *A la bonheur!*

*Sunday, 15th October*

I cannot write how and when Polish people meet in Lithuania. Not that I think the Lithuanian authorities would play them any dirty tricks. Oh, no! It is the German and Russian spies, whose number is enormous, who must not be given any information. The Lithuanians, if left alone and not egged on and browbeaten by their bullying neighbours, would probably behave correctly. But I may say that if all hosts are as hospitable and as charming as ours the numerous fugitives from Poland are shown all the sympathy and kindness they can possibly wish for. And it must be remembered that the majority of Poles who come to Kovno require clothing, help, baths, advice and shelter. This creates problems enough for the Polish colony and the various Lithuanian societies. We spent the whole morning to-day sight-seeing in the old town.

*Monday, 16th October*

I have already completed all the formalities and have only to obtain the permit to take my money, and I shall be able to catch the boat to Stockholm. I was told to-day that General Anders was reported to have succeeded in making his way with part of the brigade to Hungary. If it were true, I should be very glad indeed. The collecting of news about the people who, a few weeks ago, were part of our national existence, is like putting together the fragments of a beautiful vase; it is like picking out the pieces in an elaborate jig-saw puzzle.

All the newspapers are full of descriptions of the occupation of Vilna by Lithuanian troops, which marched in with great gusto and ceremonial. The first food trains from Lithuania have also arrived there. The price of bread in Kovno went up by five per cent. That is how the stomachs of the poor people pay the price for the glory of having Vilna.

*Tuesday, 17th October*

As I fortunately obtained all my papers in the morning, I thanked my hosts and left for Riga by the noon train. I had a little suit case they had given me with some food and the tooth brush and soap which I bought in Kovno, but no razor, because Marjan had lost it before he left for the country. I have never yet travelled on a long journey with less luggage.

The train was packed with Poles and they all said the same as I—with what warmth the Lithuanians had treated them and how much they felt the tragedy which had befallen our country. As we crossed the frontier I thought that an appropriate motto for Lithuania would be: *Vivre et laisser vivre*.

From the Poles in the train, as well as in other places, I heard many complaints against other Poles and much of that delayed jealousy and disappointment so common among refugees. Somebody in our carriage complained that the sheriff of the district in which he lived did not even notify him about the approach of the enemy. Somebody else accused a high dignitary of taking bribes, and another said that the authorities had stolen money. These grievances, of course, have to be taken with a large grain

of salt; personal animosities and disappointment play a great part in them.

We reached Riga in the evening. By night it gives the impression of a really large town; there is no comparison between it and Kovno, which seems more like a little provincial town which has only recently begun to develop.

A former pupil of mine met me at the station and took me round the town. The people of Riga are somehow gloomy and very seldom smile, which robs the town of much of its charm. They are moderately polite, but, if anything goes wrong, are easily irritable, and when drunk, as many are, are morose and aggressive. I looked in the windows of the bookshops and found that most of the foreign books displayed were German. I also saw tourist prospectuses in German inviting one to come to Danzig, Zoppot and Gdynia. Those Germans had not taken long to advertise Gdynia as a German town; Gdynia, our port, which we built from A to Z. Will they be equally prompt in returning to us what does not belong to them? In Tirgonu Jela Street and Kalka Jela Street we saw a number of very fine antique shops, some of which belonged to Germans. They were all having sales, because the owners had been told to leave the country and return to the Reich, perhaps as colonists in Poland. My friend told me that the Germans in Latvia will be forcibly removed, because Hitler wants the Latvian Government to pay him heavy compensation for the property they leave behind. Hitler was also claiming his Germans from Lithuania and Estonia. My friend showed me, in the advertisement columns of his paper, announcements of bargains which all began with the words: "Owing to Repatriation, cheap."

My young friend invited me to go with him and some other people to a cabaret that evening, an invitation which I deemed it wise to refuse as my clothes were so shabby, but he would take no refusal and we arrived there at about eleven o'clock. Our company included a young Balt, the daughter of a clergyman, and we began to talk about the repatriation of the Baltic Germans to Germany and Poland.

"Will you have to go with your father to Germany?" I asked.

The young woman was most emphatic: "Even if they killed me I would not move from Riga. Here is my home and I am resolved to stay. It is a different thing with my father; if he refused to go he would lose his means of livelihood as he is pastor of the German Church. But I do not want to have anything to do with Hitler and his lot."

I asked her whether she was an exception among the Germans of the district in feeling like that about the Führer.

"Don't think that I am telling you this because you are a Pole. Not at all. Really, hundreds of us Baltic Germans hate Hitler. Why should we go from here where we are happy?" and she continued unbosoming herself with German thoroughness. "I am soon going to marry a Latvian medical student. So you see I shall become a Latvian and then the Germans won't be able to touch me."

*Wednesday, 18th October*

I was seen off by my student and the whole company with whom we had been to the cabaret. Even the German girl came to show how much she sympathized with my country and how much she disapproved of what the Germans had done to it. We set sail for Stockholm at noon, and soon the round plump tower of Riga Castle disappeared in the distance. The harbour was swarming with German vessels, most of them from three to five thousand tons, the typical cargo boats used in the Baltic. There were certainly more than thirty of them and they were berthed in two rows awaiting their cargo with a flourish of swastikas. They were mostly Bremen boats and some were there to take the Baltic Germans and their belongings to their new compulsory homes, pulling up the roots of centuries. That they were so many showed, first, that the Germans were at present masters of the Baltic and, secondly, that they will bleed white the smaller Baltic countries, demanding from them their food and timber and other supplies. For the time being the Baltic would remain a sealed lake under the thumb of the Germans—the unfortunate result of the mistake that Great Britain and France allowed themselves in being disinterested in the Baltic area at Versailles, as Felix always said whenever we talked about it.

*Thursday, 19th October*

These Baltic currencies are very peculiar; no country will change that of another. I left Lithuania with a few litas and in Latvia no one would change them; now I have three Latvian coins which no one on the ship will accept. But the scenery here is too beautiful for one to worry about trifles. Since noon we have been in Swedish waters. As we steamed up towards Stockholm we passed several German ships carrying Swedish goods to their home ports, and probably to ours which now have to serve the Reich. The rocky islands and the blue background of the sky formed a most gorgeous, and ever-moving picture. On either shore stood stone castles, the beautiful walls of Vaxholm. Red creeper covered one of them, deep crimson in the blaze of the sun. One does not begrudge happiness to those who can find it, but one cannot help thinking how strange is the justice of Providence, to allow some nations these beautiful things and to try others with such dreadful experiences as those my poor country is now undergoing. Just to remind us of our vanished glories we passed three Polish submarines which had been interned in Sweden. They lay side by side at the quay, immobilized save for the gentle flutter of the white and red flag of Poland, like the soul of their country, stored up and waiting for its day of revival. They will, perhaps, be needed one day, those submarines, and will fulfil their duty in the struggle of freedom against tyranny.

The quietness of this landscape soaked in sun, the beauty which surrounds us, seem almost unreal after all the horror I have seen. I confided this impression to a fellow-passenger, a native of Lincoln who had spent the first two weeks of the war in Poland. He confessed that it was exactly what he had thought himself. It takes time to get used to things which are normal, beautiful and peaceful. He told me that if the ship had capsized and sailed keel upwards he would not have felt surprised.

"After what I have experienced in Poland nothing would surprise me. It is rather the normal things which appear strange. So funny you know."

It was afternoon when we reached the city of Stockholm and

entered its harbour. A French boy on deck pointed something out to his mother:

"What flag is that? White and red?"

"I don't know, but a beautiful ship, a schooner or a frigate."

I turned my head. There lay the Polish training ship *Dar Pomorza*, which I had seen on several occasions in Gdynia.

I asked one of the officers about the ships.

"They are interned here for the duration of the war. Bad luck, but we must observe international law. They were interned right at the beginning when they took refuge in Swedish territorial waters."

"Have you any idea what happened to the other ships of the Polish navy? It was small, but all its ships were new?"

"Some of them escaped and I believe are co-operating with the Allied navies. One submarine earned all our admiration by the daring of her escape—a marvellous feat. I think she joined the Allies too."

We disembarked and in a few minutes I was in the street with a university friend who was now lecturing at Stockholm University. The next boat for Britain sailed from Bergen on Saturday. This left us with only a few hours to see the town, which looked extremely festive. All the streets were gay with banners and emblems of the Scandinavian countries—Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland. Portraits of their kings—Gustav of Sweden, Haakon of Norway, Christian of Denmark, and of President Kallio of Finland—were prominently displayed in nearly every shop window and hung with coloured streamers and garlands of flowers.

"Tell me, Gösta, what are all these decorations for?"

Gösta, who in principle has a horror of any kind of display and pomp, replied: "You may think that this is a jubilee, but it isn't. The heads of the four Scandinavian countries are concluding a solemn meeting in Stockholm. We are forming a neutral bloc, assuring each other that we will stand shoulder to shoulder and support each other in the defence of our neutrality. All the loveliest promises are being made."

There was a malicious smile in his eyes as he said that. Gösta was an old friend of mine, and as long as I remember him has

had pro-Bolshevik sympathies. How many times in Cambridge did we discuss Russia and the attractions of their propaganda, their five-year plans and so on. So just to tease him I asked: "What about your views on Russia, Gösta? Are you still an admirer of Stalin?"

"You know that I have never been an admirer of Stalin, but I believed that he was sincerely interested in the welfare of the proletariat. As you ask me this question I suppose that I had better confess my complete disgust with everything that Russia has done. I cannot ever forgive Stalin the pact with Hitler, even if it were made on purely tactical grounds. You cannot make compromises with ideals, even for tactical ends. But now, I do not believe in Stalin's ideals. You were right about Russia."

I never expected such a frank admission.

"Russian policy, I see now, is actuated by imperialistic interests and that is what makes it so distasteful. The invasion of Poland was a foul thing, but even more inexcusable was the pact with Hitler."

Near the Concert Hall, with its ornamental rising elves sculptured by Millais, the street was up and great excavations in progress. Gösta stopped and, pointing at it, said: "That is going to be a very large air-raid shelter, completely bombproof."

So they had begun to realize the danger. A little too late, perhaps; if not altogether too late; who knows. But I did not want to say so to Gösta. As we sat in a café that evening he pulled a Swedish book out of his pocket and proudly laid it on the table, saying:

"This is the Swedish translation of the British Blue Book about the origin of the war just out to-day. I have read a good part of it. It has been published under the auspices of a small society here which corresponds to the Chatham House in London. But in connexion with it is something which illustrates the Germans at their best. In order to be perfectly impartial the Swedish Society of International Affairs proposed also to issue a translation of the German collection of documents on the war, but the German Government flatly refused. Do you know why? On the grounds that the translation of the Blue Book was published by de Bonniers,



to whom the Germans take exception, as they say that it is a Jewish firm. Dr. Goebbels described it as the big Jewish octopus in Stockholm. Before long the German minister in Stockholm is going to dictate to us what we must do and what we must not do."

"Well then, Gösta, how is it that so many Swedes admire the Germans so much?"

"Oh, don't you believe it. You will be surprised how opinion has changed. There is, of course, a small group of blockheads led by people like Sven Hedin, who admire the Germans and would like to follow their lead, but they do not count. The man in the street is fed up with the Germans and their propaganda. But . . ."

"But what?"

"Well, this is not because you are a Pole, but really the tragedy of Poland has stirred us very much and if we appear indifferent it is because we are not sure of the support which Britain and France would be prepared to give us, and whether it would come quickly. Poland was left entirely in the cold. We haven't got Poland's army and, unsupported, could not possibly resist the Germans successfully."

We could have gone on talking the whole evening. I was never tired of Gösta, and new subjects were very tempting, but I had to catch the night train for Oslo.

"Do you see all these fellows in topers?" said Gösta, pointing to a group on the platform.

"They are officials of our Foreign Office coming to see the King of Norway off. This is the end of the fairy tale our Northern States have concocted and he is returning home. He will travel in the same train as yourself."

"Naturally, I shall feel greatly honoured."

The clean electric train rolled on through the night to Oslo.

*Friday, 20th October*

In Scandinavia one can really feel that one has escaped. In Lithuania and Latvia it was not quite the same. On one side was Germany, on the other Russia, and the pincers could close at

any moment and that would be the end. But here I was free to breathe the lovely mountain air of Norway, which we entered at three o'clock this morning. A few hours later we arrived at Oslo, but I only had time for a visit to the barber's before the train left for Bergen.

At Bergen, which is now doing excellent business, being, in fact, the chief port of Scandinavia, I had some difficulty in finding accommodation, for it was full of business men and people come from the provinces to enjoy themselves for the week-end. Their enjoyment had, however, to exclude beer, of which there was none to be had.

*Saturday, 21st October*

It was only the next morning, in the daylight, that I realized what a beautiful place Bergen is. Surrounded by mountains, the narrow strip of the fjord coming right up to the market-place with its new and old buildings, it presents a most delightful picture. To reach the boat we passed a busy market, with piles of carrots, flowers, cabbages, fish, fowls, barrels of all sorts. I would gladly choose Bergen as a place for a summer holiday after the war, but now I was glad to think that in a short time I should be at sea. Anchors away! towards Britain.

The boat had the Norwegian colours painted on her sides and upper deck. There is a certain resemblance between the Norwegian and British flags. Let's hope German pilots will not make any mistakes. I noticed that the families of the crew were coming down to say good-bye—a war-time precaution, for they may not see them again. The Germans have already sunk several neutral ships, and anyone who remembers what they did in the last war will not be surprised that sea voyages are regarded as very risky.

There were a large number of Poles on board. Many of them played bridge and talked about seasickness, but when they realized that the sea was as quiet as a lamb and would not exact any tolls, the subject was replaced by politics. You could feel roughly to what social stratum each belonged by the way they talked about the Germans or the Bolsheviks and which they hated the more. The landed classes, or those who saw the Bolsheviks in 1920 or

## I SAW THE SIEGE OF WARSAW

during the revolution, thought that they are worse than the Germans, while the town-dwellers gave pride of place to the Germans. But really there is not much to choose between them.

*Sunday, 22nd October*

The sea has remained calm, which makes the voyage a real pleasure and a rest for the nerves. The only excitement to-day was when a passenger aeroplane sailed above the boat. Some people thought it was a bomber. In the evening we entered British territorial waters and moored in the Tyne estuary. And so I have reached my destination, taking 24 days to get from Warsaw to Britain, and the diary of a "holiday" at home in Poland comes to an end. I hope that perhaps the reader, if it finds its way into print, will discover something of value in it and that my personal reactions will not stand between him and the great events which Providence has allowed me to witness. Those events I have tried honestly to record.

*Monday, 23rd October*

Newcastle-on-Tyne. It looks just as usual in the usual rain. We wait impatiently on deck to disembark. At last we are allowed to do so in batches of 12, and are taken to the customs house.

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The customs officer looked at my tiny suit case and asked me, smiling: "Have you anything to declare?"



